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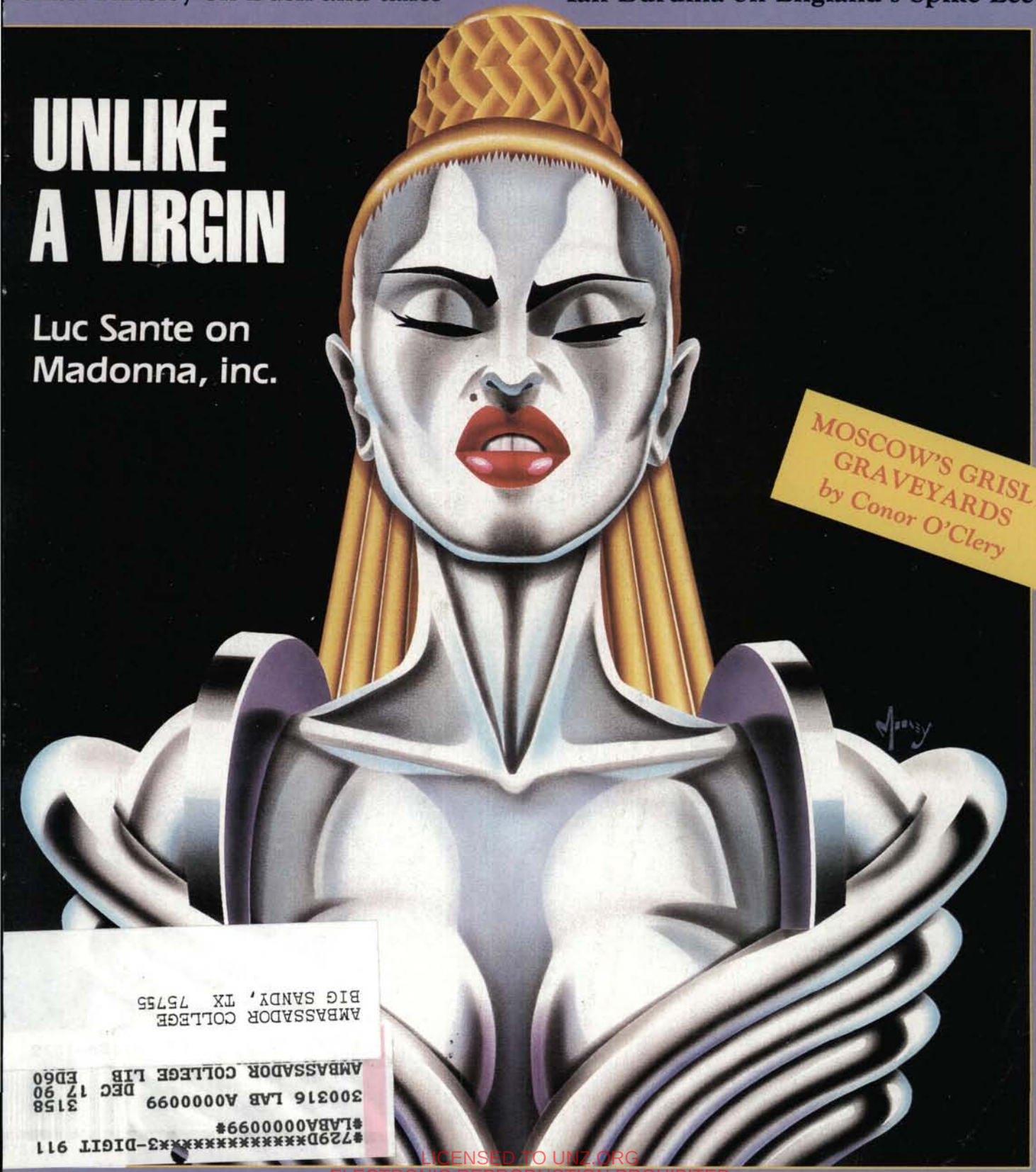

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AUGUST 20 & 27, 1990

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FROM WASHINGTON

Stock response

The oddest item on the Bush administration's now-you-see-it, now-you-don't list of possible new taxes is a securities transfer tax—a levy of perhaps half a percent on the sale of stocks, bonds, etc. This would raise several billion dollars. The impetus apparently comes from Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady, who is obsessed with the idea that American finance is plagued by too much wasteful speculation and "short-term time horizons." A transfer tax presumably would encourage investors to hold on for longer.

The Bush proposal for a capital gains tax cut is also intentionally biased against short-term investments, reserving its greatest blessings for those held for more than three years. Still, it is hard to reconcile the two tax ideas. On the one hand, the administration wants to cut the taxes on your net profits when you sell a stock. On the other hand, it wants to start taxing your gross revenues.

And not just that. One alleged benefit of the capital gains cut is that it will "unlock" old investments, encouraging investors to cash in and redirect their money in more efficient ways. Indeed, the administration's rosy predictions that a capital gains cut would *increase* tax revenues in the early years are based on people cashing in old investments, not on the incentives for new ones. Yet the transfer tax is designed to discourage exactly this type of "churning." Is that a sensible thing, or not?

What sensible people want from a tax is to raise as much money as possible with the least disruption to the economy. (What good people want from a tax, as well, is to take more from those who can more easily afford it. But that is not our sermon today. A securities transfer tax presumably would do that.) A sensible reason to oppose the capital gains cut, fairness aside, is that taxing different forms of investment at different rates distorts the economy (leading to tax shelters, etc.). A securities transfer tax, deliberately designed to create friction in the wheels of commerce, is a strange bird to be hatched by a Republican administration. Does the government know better than the free market what "time horizons" the economy ought to have?

Lamentations over "short-termism"—by now a staple of American economic discourse—often confuse three different issues. One is whether America's corporations focus too much on this year's profits, slighting projects with distant payoffs such as research and development. Two is whether financial markets are too tumultuous, with traders preferring the quick in-and-out to a more extended investing relationship. Three is whether we as a society are consuming too much of our resources while saving and investing too little for a more prosperous future.

No. 3 seems undeniably true to me, but that is a moral judgment, not an economic one. If Americans decide to live more for today and less for tomorrow, the result—through a chain of causation involving interest rates, money managers, etc.—will be that General Motors invests less in developing robots or whatever. That is financial markets working correctly, not incorrectly, and "throwing sand in the gears" (a phrase of Nobel economist James Tobin, who favors it) is no solution. The solution—boring, but true—is to reduce the largest source of social dissaving, the federal budget deficit. Three or four billion dollars from the transfer tax won't contribute much to that.

As for too much "churning" in financial markets, economists Lawrence and Victoria Summers of Harvard point out (in an article making "a cautious case" for the transactions tax) that the volume of financial transactions has exploded. In 1960, 766 million shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange all year. By 1987 the exchange was averaging 600 million shares a week. The Summerses estimate the total cost of operating the securities markets at $75 billion a year, or one-fourth of total corporate profits. And that includes the cost of using up some of America's best minds in the buying and selling of shares. The contribution of financial markets in efficiently allocating capital is worth something—but is it worth that much? The Summerses compare a lot of the effort invested by financial traders to people standing up to see better at a football game: it leaves them all, on average—that is, all of us, as a society—no better off.

Lawrence Summers and Andrei Schleifer, an economist at Chicago, have developed a set of fancy theories to explain why financial markets have a built-in bias toward the quick payoff. It has to do with the interplay between the market professionals and the "noise traders"—their charming term for idiots like you and me. What they can't explain nearly as well is why this short-termism among the paper shufflers should have any impact on what really matters, which is the time horizons of corporate managers. Is there "contagious myopia" (a Summers term)?

Keynes warned of trouble "when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation," but he didn't really explain it either. After all, even if I only plan to hold a stock for two weeks, I will be selling it to someone else, who will be selling it to someone else, and so on. How much I think these people will pay affects how much I will pay. The prospective value of a stock ten years from now ought to have the same effect on its value today, irrespective of how often it changes hands in the interim. Even assuming that corporate managers care only about raising their stock price in the short run, there is no obvious logical reason why stock market churning should discourage them from projects with long-term payoffs, if those projects otherwise make sense.

Schleifer has concocted some non-obvious reasons, but he admits they are merely "plausible, but not necessarily true." And he, unlike Summers, opposes a transactions tax on the theory that it will discourage the rational sophisticates more than the "noise traders" and therefore make the markets even more distorted.

Apart from all the arcana, there is the question whether a securities transfer tax would drive financial transactions—and the financial industry—overseas. Most big industrial countries already have such a tax—Japan raises about $12 billion a year this way—but the trend is toward reducing or eliminating them, as finance goes global and markets have to compete for business.

The transaction tax, though, is more interesting for what it says about the Bush administration than for what would happen if it was enacted. It certainly wouldn't do much good, but it probably wouldn't do much harm, either. I would just like to hear an explanation from someone up there about what exactly they think the point of it is, and how it fits into their general economic worldview, if any.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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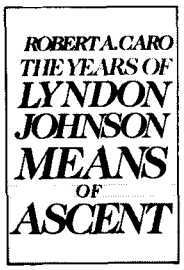

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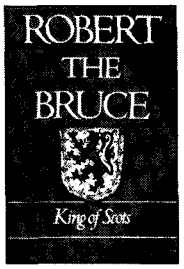

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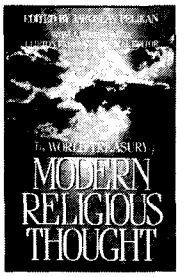

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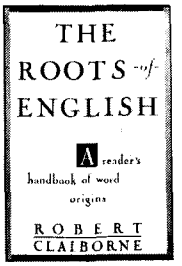

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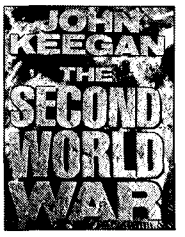

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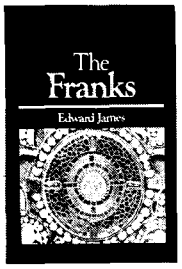

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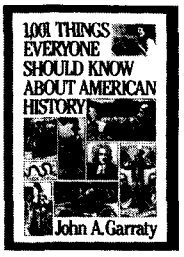

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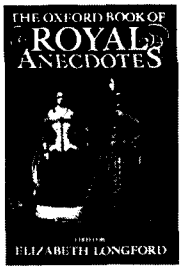

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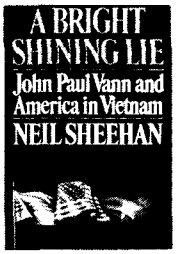

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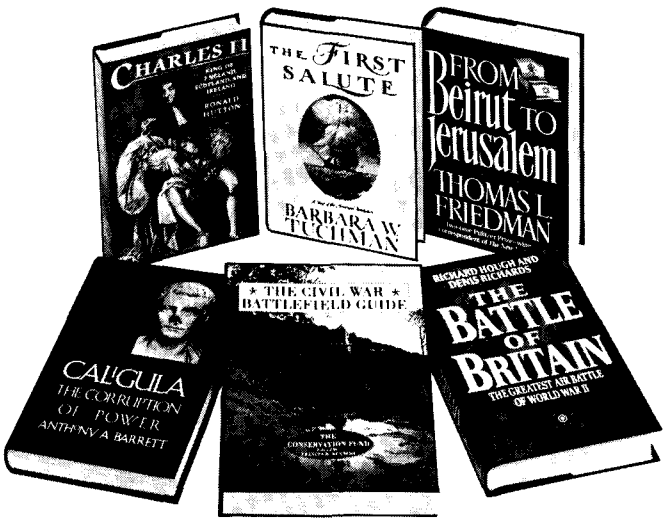

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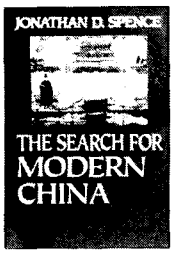

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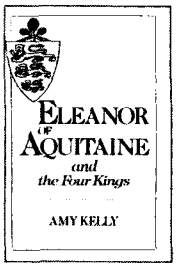

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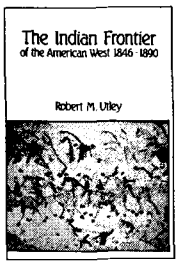

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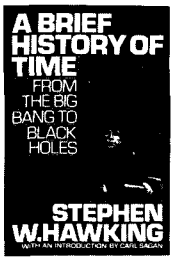

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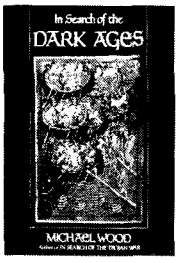

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CORRESPONDENCE

Roseanne's appeal

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley may be right when he accuses the Democratic Party of having "failed to tap the resentment of those sections of the middle class who have been losing ground in the '80s" (TRB, "Bart for President," July 23). But what makes him believe that a party that supports busing, affirmative action, increased rights for criminals, and sympathy for Communists (particularly in Nicaragua) would appeal to the people depicted in such television series as "Roseanne" and "The Simpsons"? Can Kinsley visualize the response of Roseanne's husband to preserving the spotted owl at the cost of thousands of high-paying jobs in the lumber industry?

LAWRENCE HYMAN
Ridgewood, New Jersey

Call to alarm

To the editors:

It was sad to see Andrew Sullivan stoop to cheap invective in his excursion through the "alien world" of 15,000 middle-class black people at a Louis Farrakhan rally ("Call to Harm," July 23). The article only enhanced Farrakhan's appeal as a bogeyman. And adding pending charges after initial references to Marion Barry, Gus Savage, and George Stallings—as though the charges were their official titles—reduced their association with the controversial Muslim leader to personal and professional difficulties. (Barry, by the way, wore a kente cloth, a fashion accessory of Ghanaian vintage now in vogue among black professionals.) Neglected was any discussion of the shared philosophies, goals, or fears of the public figures who, despite their alleged sins, command large constituencies.

Sullivan's not-so-subtle intent was to wrap Farrakhan in the common garb of improbity, a task more suitably left to writers of far less skill and in publications lacking the intellectual traditions of TNR. Wouldn't a more valuable enterprise have been exploring the seductions in Farrakhan's message for the multitudes of otherwise assimilated African Americans in Washington and across the country? Sullivan could have made a good start by interviewing members of the ecstatic crowd around him.

LAWRENCE MUHAMMAD
Louisville, Kentucky

Mud wrestling

To the editors:

Stephen J. Morris's "Skeletons in the Closet" (June 4), in which my work is attacked, touches on the usual, weary theme of blaming Vietnam and absolving America for Cambodia's suffering. It is also inaccurate. My documentary film *Cambodia Year Ten* was not about the anniversary of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. And though I have no objection to being described as a "tabloid journalist" in the best sense of the term, it is clear that Morris's description is pejorative. My print journalism is for the British quality press, and I have twice won Britain's highest award for journalism. This year *Cambodia Year Ten* won the Thomas Peabody award, America's highest award for television journalism.

Morris's smear that I have "an extensive résumé in support of Hanoi" is simply libelous. In reporting on Indochina for over twenty-five years I have been critical of all sides, once describing the Hanoi regime as "Stalinist" and "barbaric." My films, notably *Do You Remember Vietnam?* and my book, *Heroes*, bear testimony to this.

JOHN PILGER
London, England

Stephen J. Morris replies:

John Pilger's reference in *Heroes* to Hanoi's "Stalinist barbarity" is immediately qualified as being "one of Vietnam's many sides today." As in his films, Pilger's scanty criticism of Hanoi is swamped by the volume of apologia for Vietnam's and Cambodia's current distress—not at all attributed to their regimes' policies but only to the policies of Pol Pot and the United States.

I did not say that *Cambodia Year Ten* was about the anniversary of Vietnam's invasion, but rather that the title was an allusion to that. The film, rejected for American broadcast by the PBS network, is a propaganda tract that falsely asserts Vietnam's departure from Cambodia, whitewashes Hanoi's and Phnom Penh's human rights record, and misrepresents American policy with lies like this: "President Bush has approved American arms for what was called the non-Communist resistance. But as everybody knows that means Pol Pot."

Cherry picker

To the editors:

Having spent some time in Prague recently, I enjoyed Hendrik Hertzberg's observations about its "happy surreality" (Prague Diarist, "National Velvet," July 30 & August 6). But when he describes the "softball-sized testicles" on the automotive statue as being "cheery red," he might better have written "cherry red." Before the recent elections, the Czechoslovak Communists, for reasons no one seemed to know, took as their party symbol two cherries connected by a stem. Those cheery orbs on the "Going Somewhere?" statue are an allusion, I suspect, to the Communist cherries. During the campaign, street speakers, cartoonists, and political satirists were doing all kinds of obscene things with those cheery red Communist cherries.

JOE HOLLEY
San Diego, California

Unrequited envy

To the editors:

Thomas Byrne Edsall's review of Kevin Phillips's new book ("The Hidden Role of Race," July 30 & August 6) was quite astute. I agree that any attempt by liberals to initiate a populist uprising based on income inequality is doomed. But there may be one reason for this that Edsall overlooked. However corny it sounds today, a large part of what makes America appealing to so many people is a belief that upward mobility is possible. It seems to me that many lower- and middle-class Americans do not and will not passionately hate the rich because they hope someday to be one of them. Ordinary Americans are outraged when someone becomes wealthy through illegal actions (witness the growing anger over the S&L mess). But they do not begrudge the success of those who become wealthy by working within the system. Most Americans are more fascinated by and envious of the superwealthy than they are resentful.

RUSSELL EVANSEN
Madison, Wisconsin

EDITORS' NOTE:

God may be in some details more than others, and so the Washington Diarist of July 23 ("Praise the Lord") hastens to correct an error of fact. The romantic, slightly run-down former synagogue that is now the Greater New Hope Baptist Church was not, until 1950, the home of Congregation Adas Israel. It housed the Washington Hebrew Congregation and its rather colorful theological and political history. Congregation Adas Israel was housed two blocks away, in a less romantic and sturdier Oriental structure, beneath whose domes there flourishes the Turner Memorial African Methodist Episcopalian Church. Thus there were two happy endings in this city raw with race, two synagogues that look gladly back at black churches. •

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

AUGUST 20 & 27, 1990

TALKING HEADS

Willie Horton can say this much for himself: his political legacy outweighs that of any convicted rapist in American history. Not only did he help get George Bush elected president; he also has brought disgust with the quality of campaign discourse to a new high, a fact that bodes well for the future. In the wake of the 1988 presidential campaign, a number of people are in the mood to dilute the influence of vacuous and/or scurrilous campaign commercials. New proposals are circulating, and old ones have been given new moment. If some of this idealism can be harnessed before Horton's visage fades from public memory, the 1992 election campaigns—congressional as well as presidential—could be markedly more informative, more honest, and less depressing than the last. Legislation aimed directly at this goal would be more worthwhile than any of the campaign finance reforms now afoot in Congress.

The Willie Horton problem is not, of course, wholly a product of the 1980s. (We're using Horton here the way he's accustomed to being used—emblematically. The advertisements coming out of Michael Dukakis's camp in 1988 were nothing to boast about. Ditto for those from most congressional candidates, Democratic and Republican.) The plain unvarnished truth has never been the basic currency of political campaigning. And politicians have sought to master the uniquely manipulative properties of television ever since it became a common piece of furniture. Indeed, in the early 1950s, even before most American homes had TV sets, President Eisenhower enlisted screen star Robert Montgomery to counsel him in the subliminal uses of the cool medium. But consider the swiftness of the recent descent into unmitigated artifice. Two decades ago, in *The Selling of the President*, Joe McGinnis provoked sharp intakes of breath by revealing that the questioners allowed to quiz Richard Nixon during a series of paid hour-long Q & A sessions had been selected by the Nixon staff. Today a presidential candidate who bought an hour's worth of network time to answer substantive questions would be hailed as a statesman on the order of Vaclav Havel, even if the questions were posed by his wife, kids, and pollster.

Indeed, it is symptomatic of how low everyone's expectations have fallen that several proposed reforms would merely extend some campaign commercials beyond the fifteen- and thirty-second mark. A plan from the Center for Responsive Politics would compel TV stations to provide free air time for House and Senate candidates in the form of five-minute chunks. This is fine as far as it goes (though it may be naive to hope that candidates would use the time to utter several consecutive paragraphs, rather than simply pay the Roger Aileses of the world to produce short horror films or long MTV

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segments). Similarly, there is no harm, and possibly some good, in a bill, sponsored by Senator Bob Graham and Representative Ed Markey, that would institutionalize presidential debates. The law would oblige presidential candidates who use public financing to participate in at least four ninety-minute encounters, each with thirty minutes of direct dialogue unencumbered by inanely provocative questions from preening journalists. This would at least slightly raise the signal-to-noise ratio. So too would an idea that is easier to implement: make PBS set aside fifteen prime-time minutes once or twice a week for each presidential candidate to address the nation.

But isn't there anything more, well, radical to be done about the role of TV in political campaigns? Anything so extreme that television might never see the likes of Willie Horton again?

Senators Warren Rudman and Daniel Inouye have periodically proposed a law dictating that campaign commercials in federal elections consist only of the candidate talking. No voice-overs, no animated flip-flops, no gauzy grandpas on sun-dappled porches, no bears in the woods. Just a human head—the head of the human being in question—with words coming out of a human mouth. What a pleasant thought.

This mandatory regulation of format, if tested in the courts, might well be deemed a violation of the First Amendment. But more subtle versions of such a talking-heads rule are available. For example: make the regulations voluntary and provide a strong incentive to accept them by granting free TV time in exchange. Most of the objections to this approach come, predictably, from TV stations. Ignore them. Broadcast stations are granted a big piece of a limited resource—the broadcast spectrum—for free. Cable stations share in a government-protected oligopoly. Surely some free air time every two years isn't too much to pay for these privileges.

Some technical wrinkles would have to be ironed out. TV stations in the New York and Los Angeles areas and other sprawling media markets would find themselves donating to several Senate races and perhaps dozens of House races. More important, in these vast demographic crazy quilts, candidates might not get much from a little free time on lots of stations. A candidate from Harlem, say, might prefer to be seen intensively on a Hispanic cable TV station, or heard on a black radio station. The solution is to give candidates vouchers to "spend" at any radio or TV station and place a ceiling on how much time stations must give in return. (Radio stations, like TV stations, profit from a free broadcasting license and thus have no business griping when the government passes the hat.) When a station's donation exceeded the ceiling, it would be reimbursed by the government at standard ad rates, ideally with money raised through a more ambitious "check-off" provision on income tax returns.

This reform, by itself, might dilute only slightly the noxious political froth that emanates from TV sets every two years. Suppose, for example, that candidates accepted the free time and abided by the rules. Suppose, even, that this time came in larger than average chunks (one minute, say, or ninety seconds), thus encouraging lengthy, substantive discourses. That would be an improvement. But candidates might well keep spending one-third to one-half of their treasury on more traditional media fare; the freebies would just be gravy. Hence another prerequisite for free air time: the candidate's acceptance of a total spending limit.

Such a ceiling has a second virtue that we have stressed before (see "Demand-Side Reform," August 7 & 14, 1989). It would cut the influence of political action committees more effectively than the various more direct approaches, which typically amount to futile dike-plugging operations. For example, Democrats and Republicans in the Senate have now agreed to seek a ban on PACs. Sounds nice, but consider the case of Markey, chairman of the House telecommunications and finance subcommittee. Markey refuses to accept PAC money. Nonetheless, according to *The Washington Post*, in the past three years he has collected several hundred thousand dollars in contributions of $200 or more from outside his home state of Massachusetts, mostly from people with ties to the telecommunications and financial industries. What exactly is the difference between that money and PAC money?

The current flurry of congressional proposals for campaign reform nicely, if obliquely, illustrates the general virtues of a talking-heads rule. Democrats in the Senate have talked about imposing a spending limit rather like the one we advocate—a "voluntary" ceiling, along with a strong incentive to volunteer. And, though their incentive would consist of across-the-board public funding for campaigns, rather than just the free media time we propose, a fraction of that funding would come as vouchers for TV and radio ads. But in the absence of some complementary regulation of the form the ads can assume, these public funds would mainly pay for more mindless fifteen-second spots. This isn't likely to sit well with the source of the funds—whether all taxpayers or just those who check off a box on their tax forms. And of course, even without media vouchers, much of any public funding will always go to pay for media. So, for those who would advocate taxpayer-financed congressional campaigns, a helpful reminder is this: public funding untethered to any media regulation is unlikely to yield campaigns that the public is eager to fund.

The reform we propose—lots of free TV and radio time in exchange for voluntary spending limits and voluntary compliance with a talking-heads rule—wouldn't, alas, be the end of all trashy fifteen-second spots. (After all, the spending ceiling can't be set so low as to keep candidates from accepting the deal, so they'll always have money to spend on ads of unconstrained form.) But it could be the beginning of the end. In our most wildly optimistic moments, we imagine that the proliferation of straightforward talking heads would foster a new ethic, attaching a stigma to ads of the Willie Horton genre. In our less optimistic moments, we suspect that there would be another Willie Horton, but that, at least, he would be less consequential than the first one.

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NOTEBOOK

PRETTY CUTE: For months the Democrats have been yelling, "Tax the rich, tax the rich." So the Bush administration comes up with a proposal: cap the deduction for state income taxes at $10,000 per couple. This would raise billions, almost all of it from people making more than $100,000 a year. It also would penalize high-income-tax states, most especially New York. Nevertheless, the earlier tax-the-rich rhetoric, from Mario Cuomo among others, makes it hard to oppose. In fact, it's not a bad way to raise some revenue, and it's diabolically clever: a way of taxing the rich that is also a way of taxing taxing the rich. But a couple of caveats. First, Bush, with a lot of highfalutin talk about federalism, has been trying to slough off one government duty after another onto the states. It is quite hypocritical for him at the same time to make it harder for the states to finance these obligations. Second, having abandoned his no-new-taxes pledge, Bush is supposedly drawing a line in the sand against raising top marginal tax rates. Yet the effect of capping the state income tax deduction is precisely the same as increasing marginal tax rates (by 28 percent of your state income tax rate, whatever that is). So now that the principle has been breached, why not go all the way and raise marginal rates on everyone?

VACLAV THE FORGIVER: The introduction of ethics into politics in Eastern and Central Europe felled an ideology and an empire, but it seems now to have become also something of a conceit. What in the moral imagination of President (formerly prisoner) Havel of Czechoslovakia deluded him into mistaking his meeting with President (formerly Lieutenant) Waldheim of Austria for a noble deed? Perhaps Havel considered the boycott of Waldheim a form of denial; in fact it is a form of truth-telling. Perhaps Havel thought it was a gesture of reconciliation; but it is for Waldheim's victims to do the reconciling with Waldheim. Perhaps Havel believed that this is the European moment of which he has dreamed, that the continent must be healed before it can emerge as a great new force in the wake of the cold war; but Europe will be healed only by remorseless truthfulness about the past. Havel, of course, would agree. At the Salzburg meeting he gave a speech against the rewriting of history: "He who fears facing his own past must necessarily fear what lies before him. . . . Falsifiers of history do not safeguard freedom but imperil it." Golden words. They were directed, of course, at Waldheim, who denied, of course, that they were directed at him. But this time they turn rather sharply against their author. There are certain kinds of forgiving that amount to forgetting, gestures of reconciliation that amount to falsifications of history. In Salzburg Havel looked like a hypocrite, and it was a terrible sight. Recall that in Prague, at the outset of the campaign leading up to the elections in June, Havel kept some candidates out of the race by privately confronting them with their secret police files. He forbade secret Communist agents to run, in short, and then hung out with a secret Nazi. "I don't want to say that this posture didn't originally have an ethical basis," Havel said about the boycott of Waldheim. "Of course it did. But by turning it into a ritual it becomes void and loses its original moral content and becomes a cliché." This is drivel. And Havel's drivel is especially saddening, for the words that he mangles are the words he gilded, the words that made his revolution real.

BACK TO SCHOOL: In a few weeks America's colleges and universities will reopen for the fall term. And if the past is prologue, there will be much sturm und drang on many of these campuses about the number of blacks in the professoriat. For there are very few. Some outside the academy attribute this paucity to racist hiring practices. This explanation also appeals to large numbers of students, to judge from their tribunes in campus governments and on campus newspapers. From this perspective it's quite easy to prescribe structural remedies aimed at increasing the number of black academics in the classroom. Under threat of being tarred as racists, administrators often will—cynically, we think—endorse such remedies. The problem is that they won't work. Why they won't work is explained by Abigail Thernstrom in a sad but wise and balanced article, titled "On the Scarcity of Black Professors," in the July *Commentary*. She notes, for example, that in 1988 only five blacks received Ph.D.s in American history, a number smaller than the number of American historians at many small colleges. In twenty fields (including astronomy, European history, astrophysics, comparative literature, Japanese, Russian, Chinese) no blacks at all received Ph.D.s. Of the 608 Americans receiving doctorates in mathematics and computer science only two were black. There is not a vast reserve for role models, least of all in the cutting-edge disciplines. This is part of the sobering background to the increasingly volatile issue of race on campus—a topic, by the way, on which TNR will publish a special issue next fall.

WHO'S AN "L" NOW?: During his uplifting campaign for president, George Bush daily denounced the "L-word," the "L-crowd," and even, inexplicably, the "L-Bank." Five months after his inauguration, however, he praised the L-word in a conversation with the pope on recent developments in Poland. "Liberalization" was the variation the president used, and he was heartily in favor of it. The C-word, incidentally, is not a word he has ever employed in commending the changes in Central Europe. In November 1989 the First Lady confessed in an interview with NBC News: "I am a liberal on such things as helping the poor and

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human rights." Then Lee Atwater, Bush's 1988 campaign manager and Republican National Committee chairman, admitted to *The Washington Post*: "I am a classical liberal thinker, and I think power is evil." To the president's wife and his top political adviser, the L-word was not so bad after all; it reflected beneficence and intellectuality. Poppy had to have something to denigrate in the campaign, but now the campaign was over. Amnesia was in order for the sake of all concerned. But as the midterm elections approach, with the Republicans facing a sudden shortage of bogeymen, Bush is desperately trying to pump fright into the L-word again. In a speech before the New York Republican Party on July 24, he slammed it nine times as the source of all wrong in the world. We wish he would clear his speeches beforehand with Barbara. In any case, we suspect that voters this year may find the S&L-word more relevant than the L-word. By the way, was Neil Bush on the board of directors of the L-Bank?

NERO'S FIRE SAFETY TIPS: Just over a year ago the directors of the Corcoran Gallery pre-emptively censored a scheduled exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, thus igniting the conflagration that is destroying the National Endowment for the Arts. Now the Corcoran asks its members, in the gallery's July newsletter, to "send a message asserting support for the reauthorization of the NEA without censorship" by participating in People for the American Way's campaign to deluge Congress with telegrams. The sentiment is nice, but isn't this a little like Captain Joseph Hazelwood lecturing on environmental protection, or Charles Keating pronouncing on ways to keep down the costs of the savings and loan bailout (which he has in fact been doing)?

O SAY CAN YOU SING: The national anthem has now been rendered memorably three times that we know of. First was in 1939, when Marian Anderson, having been barred from Constitution Hall by the then-racist Daughters of the American Revolution, sang it, beautifully, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Second was in 1969, when Jimi Hendrix greeted the dawn's early light at Woodstock with an electric guitar version that was, well, electric. Third was last week, when Roseanne Barr, the fat, iconoclastic TV star, screeched it out before a San Diego Padres game, after which she spat, ballplayer-style, and adjusted her (presumably imaginary) jockstrap. This has occasioned an amazing wave of pompous indignation, with stern calls for everything but an anti-Roseanne constitutional amendment. *The Washington Post*'s usually sensible William Raspberry, for example, wrote that "some subjects aren't fit for humor," including "the emblems of American democracy." We'd put that another way: all subjects are fit for humor, especially the emblems of American democracy. And of all the emblems of American democracy, few are as fit for humor as the national anthem, which has pretty good words but tune-wise is basically unsingable unless you're Marian Anderson. That was the point of Roseanne's joke. Geddit?

NIL NISI BONUM: Thurgood Marshall went on ABC's "Prime Time Live" last week and showed what happens when he gives an opinion without help from his clerks. "I consider him dead!" announced the eighty-two-year-old justice. "Who?" asked a startled Sam Donaldson. "Bush!" came the reply. "He's still alive, Mr. Justice." "You're damn right he is," said Marshall. "I just don't understand what he's doing . . ." Marshall's frustration and loneliness are understandable, given the departure from the Supreme Court of his friend William Brennan; and perhaps Marshall was just being irascible. He seemed to be trying to say that Bush is out of touch. But that is a glass house at which Marshall is in no position to throw stones.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS: The following report was issued by Kyodo, the Japanese news service:

TOKYO, July 16 — An official of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Monday advised Japanese negotiators to use "Eastern" logic when dealing with U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills, saying he was surprised to find that she is "easy to handle."

"Hills only throws straight balls, she doesn't throw curve balls," Deputy Secretary General of the LDP Takayuki Sato said in a speech to the summit negotiating team assembled to welcome Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu home from last week's Houston Summit.

"She comes at you with logic, so an Eastern philosophy of life is sufficient to placate her," Sato said.

Sato said he gained the insights into the top U.S. trade negotiator after engaging in intensive dinner conversation with Hills for over two hours at the Houston Summit.

Flattery may also be a useful device, Sato implied. During the meal he said he complimented Hills's husband, causing the trade representative to smile broadly.

"She's a woman after all, that was my impression," Sato remarked. Sato, 61, later commented privately during the reception that he found the 56-year-old Hills "charming and cute," but added she is "getting on a bit in age."

THE VEEP HALF EMPTY: Quayle's spin doctors are at it again. In an item titled "Quayle Gets a Confidence Vote," the July 30 issue of *Newsweek* reported that thirty-five of forty-eight state GOP chairmen—73 percent—think that the vice president should be Bush's running mate again in 1992. One wonders why the item wasn't titled "Quayle's Support Shaky," the salient bit of information being that 27 percent of GOP chairmen want Quayle dumped from the ticket. •

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STANDING SOFT

By Fred Barnes

When President Bush announced he'd chosen David Souter as his nominee for the Supreme Court, he insisted that John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, had played little or no role in the selection. "There was almost a certain recusal on the part of Governor Sununu on this," Bush said. That, an aide said later, wasn't quite true. Sununu participated in discussions on a replacement for Justice William Brennan, but he "held back" so he wouldn't "prejudice the debate." That wasn't entirely true either. Sununu gave several White House aides the strong impression that he supported Edith Jones, the conservative federal appeals judge in Texas who was runner-up to Souter. No, said Sununu himself, that's not right. He gave "strong personal support" to Souter. "I was looking for someone who would be a strict constructionist, consistent with basic conservative attitudes, and that's what I got," he told R. W. Apple of *The New York Times.*

You figure it out. For months now Bush's views, policies, and goals have been growing more and more fuzzy. He's nominally opposed to abortion, but he no longer can bring himself to say so. When asked about the issue, he merely asserts that his view hasn't changed, while never defining exactly what it was in the first place. I assume he's taking this tack in hopes of defusing the abortion issue and keeping the pro-choicers at bay. In line with that, he picked a Court nominee, Souter, whose views are virtually unknown on *Roe* v. *Wade* and most other legal issues of nationwide interest. Now Sununu, the fellow whose actions and advice were supposedly a rock of steadiness on the senior Bush staff, is crumbling.

There are three things going on here. The first is pretty obvious: conflict-avoidance. It has become a deeply ingrained habit at the Bush White House. Cynics would say it's a political strategy for keeping Bush out of trouble so that he'll be re-elected with ease in 1992. It's that, but it's also simply the way Bush does business. He campaigns hard, governs soft. As candidate, he's a fighter. As president, he'd rather compromise, or switch, than fight. If he wins in 1992, Bush will operate the same soft way in his second term, even with the burden of re-election lifted. "We don't do fighting in this administration," says a senior Bush aide. "We do bipartisan compromising."

The search for the conflict-free middle leads Bush in strange directions. In his selection of Souter, anonymity became a virtue. Were Souter known widely or for anything in particular, he might have critics or enemies, and he might have trouble winning Senate confirmation. Souter, Mr. Anonymous, probably won't. The White House also elevated Bush's ignorance of Souter's views on specific legal issues to a virtue. When Bush chatted with Souter in their first meeting, a senior aide said, he asked questions like, "Do you believe the Supreme Court ought to legislate?" and "Do you believe in strict construction of the Constitution?" No doubt Souter slammed these gopher balls out of the park. The Bush aide said that the president passed over several questions (on crime, for one thing) that Boyden Gray, the White House counsel, had drafted for him. Too specific. "He felt it was valuable to say he didn't ask anything specific," the aide said. And sure enough, Bush boasted at the press conference to announce Souter that "it would have been inappropriate to ask him his views on specific issues." Why? Bush didn't say, but the reason is he'd prefer that Souter's views aren't known. That might cause conflict between the White House and the Senate.

The second thing going on here is that Bush is sailing without a rudder and a map. His presidency has no definition, no political purpose in the short run other than averting a serious fight. He darts in unforeseen directions. On civil rights, the administration initially opposed any new legislation, then drafted its own bill, and now favors the sweeping Kennedy-Hawkins bill with modifications. Is there a real Bush position in all this maneuvering? I don't think so. He was carried along by the wish to stay out of combat. On government-imposed costs to business, Bush is ready to apply heavy ones in the Clean Air Act and Americans with Disabilities Act. To stop these bills, he'd have to wage an unpopular fight, which isn't his style. Meanwhile, he vetoed the parental leave bill, which would impose a much smaller cost on business. My guess is that the veto, though it involved him in a small fight with Congress, spared him a bigger fight with organized business.

Bush's tactic of neutralizing Democratic issues by compromising them away makes political sense. As a result, Democrats aren't able to bludgeon him on trade, the environment, and day care. Now Bush has begun compromising on, or passing up chances to exploit, his own Republican issues—taxes, spending, anti-quotas, the death penalty. The budget summit was designed to get meaningful deficit reduction without fighting publicly over taxes and spending. The alternative was sticking to his no-new-taxes pledge, calling for painful spending cuts, and threatening the deep cuts that come automatically under Gramm-Rudman if all else fails. You can imagine the brutal fight this would entail. (Some Bush advisers, especially Treasury Secretary Nick Brady, also think this alternative would cause economic panic.) Bush went the summit route, and now

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Democrats are skillfully playing on his desire for a quick agreement and on his unwillingness to fight. As they dawdle, Bush makes concessions, first agreeing to drop his anti-tax pledge, then proposing to raise income taxes by trimming the deduction for state and local income taxes. Bush's complaints about dawdling aren't taken seriously by Democrats. They have Bush on the run, running from a fight.

In Bush's stump speech, the tax issue is gone and the spending issue is muted. At a rally in Philadelphia on July 24, he complained that Congress was exceeding his spending requests. He cited, among others, an emergency appropriation "with over $1 billion of new, unrequested, unrelated domestic spending." Of course, he didn't mention that he'd signed the bill. Bush all but nullified his attack on excess spending by noting that "Congress and I are working hard to put America's fiscal house in order. . . . I salute those Democrats in the leadership who are now working with me." At a dinner in New York that night, Bush zinged the "liberal mindset of the Democratic Party" and said Democrats "have a long track record on spending." But "times can change," he said, and he launched into a tribute to House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt, the chief Democratic negotiator at the budget summit. Hardly a way to arouse Republicans, but Bush wants a summit agreement, not a partisan fight.

The third thing is the downside of Bush's approach, the opportunity costs. The opportunity to play up the old tax-and-spend theme is gone. The speeches show that. On civil rights, Bush has the opportunity to stress his distaste for racial quotas. This is an important issue to "soft" Democrats, mostly ethnic Catholics and Southerners who make up roughly a quarter of the coalition that keeps electing GOP presidents. Support for Bush among these Democrats is eroding rapidly, says pollster Neil Newhouse. Still, Bush and Sununu are eager to settle for almost any compromise on quotas that will allow Bush to sign the civil rights bill. Sununu negotiated a compromise with Senator Edward Kennedy that weakened but didn't eliminate the quota problem. Republican senators protested and at the White House everyone but Bush "was appalled," an official says. Sununu backed away from that deal and forged another that business lobbyists denounced as quota-producing. Kennedy pulled out of that deal, and so Bush and Sununu are still looking for a compromise.

To calm Republican discontent in Congress over concessions at the budget summit, Sununu has told GOP leaders that Bush is poised to fight if Democrats don't offer a fair deal. In the fall campaign, he'll blame the summit breakdown and the automatic spending cuts that follow on Democrats. Republicans roll their eyes when they hear this. "Can you imagine Bush doing anything like that?" a House Republican leader says. Bush said flag burning was such a national problem that a constitutional amendment was needed. Yet he barely lifted a finger—a speech to the nation wasn't considered—when the amendment came to a vote. Nor did he put pressure on the House when it voted on a balanced budget amendment in July. It failed by seven votes.

The assumption at the White House is that four years of fuzzy policies and minimal conflict will lead to re-election. That assumption is based on two others: that the economy will hold up and Democrats will nominate another liberal punching bag. But maybe all these assumptions are wrong. "If there's an economic downturn or if the Democrats nominate a genuinely exciting candidate, I wonder about George Bush's ability to come back and do battle," says Representative Vin Weber. I wonder too. Democrats, take heart. •

Saddam beats up on Kuwait.

NEIGHBORHOOD BULLY

By Morton Kondracke and W. Seth Carus

Slow to anger, or possibly just slow to recognize a monster when he's oil-rich, the Bush administration is finally thinking about switching its strategy toward Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Under the new approach the United States would try to coerce him into decent behavior instead of just coaxing him. But in spite of multiple provocations—the latest involving military threats against his little neighbors, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates—the administration still does not consider him "an adversary." Or, as one top State Department official put it, "We see him engaged in menacing behavior, yes, but not as a menace. He's not Qaddafi, for instance—beyond hope of change."

Actually, Saddam Hussein is more dangerous by far than Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, who is geographically isolated in North Africa, has a population of only 4.3 million, and is regarded even among his fellow Arabs as a raving lunatic. Hussein has a population of 17 million with a million men under arms. He is $80 billion in debt but has the world's second-biggest oil reserves. He just beat Iran, which has three times his population, to become the dominant power in the Persian Gulf and the savior of Araby from revolutionary Shiism. A ruthless, absolute dictator at home, he aspires to surpass Egypt and Syria and be the undisputed boss of the whole Arab world. Using force and intimidation, he may just do it. And, as he makes clear repeatedly, he regards the West—notably the United States, Israel, and Britain—as the permanent adversary of Arab destiny.

Last year the newly installed Bush administration

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THE WILL TO WIN: WE'VE STILL GOT IT IN AMERICA.

Nobody knows better than the UAW how important a healthy U.S. auto industry is to our common future. The auto industry directly or indirectly employs two million people and supports leading-edge technologies and processes. It's a bellwether for the future of U.S. manufacturing.

UAW members are putting more than ever into the job of building top quality. We want to continue the rapid quality and productivity gains of recent years. Our goal is to build vehicles that all Americans can be proud to own.

We demand that the companies support that goal. They need to show consistent support for our efforts instead of threatening workers with frequent layoffs and plant closings . . . instead of shifting production to foreign facilities and suppliers. They need to focus on long-term market share instead of short-term profits.

We need stability and security to do the job we want to do and the job that you deserve.

And that's the bottom line: quality products for American consumers.

UAW

BECAUSE AMERICAN JOBS ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

International Union, UAW

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concluded in a National Security Directive on the Gulf that the Soviet Union and Iran (despite its defeat) were greater threats to U.S. interests in the region than Iraq. The administration didn't change its mind even when, this April, Hussein threatened to burn half of Israel with chemical weapons if it attacked his territory or any other Arab country. The administration did block $500 million in agricultural credits scheduled for Iraq but claimed it was doing so pending an investigation of how the money was being used, and not for political reasons.

Last month, however, Hussein provoked a crisis by using naked force to intimidate Kuwait (population 1.9 million) and the UAE (population 1.6 million). First, he massed 30,000 troops on Kuwait's borders and demanded that it and the UAE adhere to oil production quotas set by the OPEC cartel in order to raise the price of oil by $2 a barrel. By producing more, he said, the two countries were conspiring with the United States and Israel to depress Arab oil revenues. Even though Kuwait and the UAE yielded, Hussein escalated his troop presence on the border to 100,000, backed by hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces, and demanded that Kuwait fork over billions of dollars for allegedly stolen oil (pumped from Kuwaiti territory that Iraq claims) and cancel billions more in war debts. Since Kuwait is roundly disliked in the Arab world for putting money ahead of the Arab cause, Iraq's move was not entirely unpopular, but it still inspired fear in other capitals.

Finally the administration has changed its tactics. In a moved that caught Hussein's attention (causing him to call in U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie to complain), the administration sent two military tanker planes to help the UAE (which promptly denied any cooperation with the United States) and sent six ships on maneuvers in the Gulf. Also, administration officials began talking about a "review" of U.S. policy toward Iraq, about "sanctions"—especially limits on export of computers and industrial items that might have military uses—and, more vaguely, the use of "coercion" to affect Iraqi behavior. Still, administration lobbyists were furiously fighting bills sponsored by Senators Nancy Kassebaum, Alfonse D'Amato, Daniel Inouye, and Robert Kasten, and by Representative Howard Berman to cut off all trade credits, on the grounds that it would leave the United States without future leverage on Iraq.

Most important perhaps, ranking administration officials now are talking about Iraq in terms of a "threat" and a "danger"—now "at least the equal of Iran and the Soviet Union," one official said. Realism is finally dawning. Last year, Bush aides say, the administration's first strategy review anticipated continuing the "improved relationship" with Iraq that developed during the Iran-Iraq war—despite the fact that Iraq started the war in the first place, that Iraq attacked innocent shipping far more than Iran ever did, and that it initiated the use of chemical weapons. In the Reagan administration, according to former national security adviser Robert McFarlane, the idea of close ties between Iraq and the United States—including provision of intelligence to the Iraqis—was pushed by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, a notorious foe of U.S.-Israeli cooperation.

Instead of a wartime marriage of convenience, Bush planners thought there could be broad-gauge cooperation with Iraq even on Middle East peace issues, since Iraq had sponsored Egypt's return to membership in the Arab League. Now Iraq is threatening Israel, providing a haven for terrorists Abu Abbas and Abu Nidal, and engaging in what one administration official calls "an omnibus, all-directional military procurement effort."

Therein lies the biggest danger. Two years after Iran's defeat, Iraq is spending almost as much on its military as it did during wartime—$10 billion, about 18 percent of GNP. It has an army of more than fifty divisions (vs. twelve each in Israel and Egypt, nine for Syria), 6,000 tanks, 5,000 artillery pieces, and 700 combat aircraft. Unlike most Third World countries, it's been able to import weapons from both East and West—Mirage fighters from France, MiGs from the Soviet Union—and it is building its own AWACS (airborne warning planes), main battle tanks, field artillery, and electronic systems.

The key to Iraq's long-range threat, though, is its unconventional weaponry. Iraq used thousands of tons of chemical agent during the war with Iran. It used gas, too, against its own rebellious Kurds, killing thousands of civilians. Currently, Iraq is the world's largest manufacturer of chemical weapons, and if the Soviet Union and the U.S. implement bilateral agreements to destroy their weapons, it will have the world's largest inventory of chemical weapons by the late 1990s. According to U.S. officials, Iraq also is developing biological weapons.

Baghdad has one of the largest missile programs in the Third World. It has spent at least $1 billion on missile factories and research facilities. It fired 189 medium-range Al Husayn rockets at Iranian cities in 1988 and has fifty within striking distance of Israel. It is developing more modern missiles with ranges up to 2,000 kilometers.

And, in spite of the 1981 Israeli attack, Iraq is almost certain to develop nuclear weapons—three to five years from now, Israeli experts estimate; five to ten years, according to U.S. experts. Its new nuclear sites are dispersed and believed to be guarded by air defense. Meanwhile, Israel is deterred from an attack by Iraq's chemical arsenal, which would have to be destroyed in a sizable air operation now, whereas only a dozen planes took out Iraq's nuclear facility in 1981. The chances are that Iraq will not provoke a war with Israel anytime soon, but will bide its time until it is the first Arab nation to develop nuclear weapons—which will deter Israeli attack and enhance Iraq's political primacy among the Arabs.

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What's the United States to do about this? Administration officials contend that a containment strategy won't work the way it did against the Soviets in Europe and Asia because none of Iraq's neighbors is big enough to resist it—except Iran, which is presently beaten, weak, and inimical to the United States—and none is willing to serve as a U.S. base. Officials say the alternatives they prefer are to try and alter Iraq's behavior, applying sticks as well as carrots; to reduce U.S. reliance on Gulf oil (possibly through imposition of an oil import fee, although a gasoline tax would be more effective); to develop a "businesslike" relationship with Iran, and work on improving it as time goes on; to retain (and possibly upgrade) U.S. military presence in the region and provide more security assistance and political support to Iraq's Arab neighbors.

The Iraqi threat ought to make the administration less inclined to pressure Israel for a deal with the Palestinians. After all, Hussein's drive for regional hegemony would be under way even if Israel didn't exist, and Israel is America's staunchest strategic ally against Iraq. That's not the way the administration sees it, however. To bolster pro-Western Arabs politically, officials say, it's important to make "progress" on the Arab-Israeli front. That's likely to mean more pressure on Israel. Instead of that, the administration ought to be stressing strategic cooperation with Israel—and, if possible, arranging secret talks between Israel and Iraq. It's not impossible. Israel now holds regular talks with Syria.

The basis of U.S. policy ought to be balance of power. According to Barry Rubin of the Washington Institute on Near East Policy, "The 1980s were a period of tilting toward Iraq to counter Iran; the 1990s have got to be a period of tilting against Iraq and toward its neighbors," including former U.S. adversaries Iran and Syria as well as allies Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Gulf states. The United States has an opportunity to exploit the fact that all of Iraq's neighbors now fear Hussein and resent him for his brutality, personal ambition, and lack of subtlety. "They're not so willing to be his allies now," says Rubin. "They are afraid they will end up his lunch." It's especially important that the United States work to counter growing Iraqi influence in Jordan.

The United States also ought to urgently organize its own allies in Europe and elsewhere to deny Iraq material it needs for unconventional weapons and delivery systems—delaying deployments even if they cannot be stopped forever. Someone, possibly Israel, organized an extreme and illegal form of denial by assassinating key Iraqi weapons adviser Gerald Bull in Belgium this spring. More acceptably, the U.S. Commerce Department is now working to readapt for Iraq and like countries the technology control machinery formerly used against the Soviet bloc. However, in its haste to dismantle those COCOM restrictions to benefit Eastern Europe and Western businesses, the administration actually created a temporary new channel for Iraq to acquire weapons technology.

Yet another U.S. opportunity lies in Hussein's paranoia about the United States. *He* believes, even if the United States does not, that this country is a nearly omnipotent superpower capable of imposing its will around the globe. For instance, Hussein apparently believes (because Iranian officials said so) that Iran decided to quit fighting in mid-July 1988 because it feared more direct U.S. intervention like the July 3 shooting down of one of its airliners by a U.S. warship. America's reputation is enhanced by the strategic retreat of the Soviet Union. If the United States says it will not tolerate Iraqi intimidation of its neighbors—Saudi Arabia probably will be next to come under pressure for debt forgiveness—the chances are that Hussein, like many a bully, will back down.

W. SETH CARUS, on leave from the Washington Institute on Near East Policy, is an Olin fellow at the Naval War College Foundation.

Bones beneath Moscow.

THE BURIED TRUTH

By Conor O'Clery

MOSCOW

From my office window I can see the onion domes and bell tower of the Novospasski monastery, one of the ancient fortified churches that once guarded the southern approaches to the Russian capital. I used to take visitors there to show them a corner of old Moscow not mentioned in any tourist guidebook. The buildings are in disrepair and the garden overgrown, but from across an ornamental pond there's a beautiful view of the sixteenth-century crenellated walls and their conical wooden towers. It's peaceful there, though the Kremlin is less than two miles away. In the summer people have sunbathed along the pond's bank, which is blanketed with forty-foot trees. In winter it is a magical sight, with the bank covered in snow and children skating on the ice.

One strange thing about the bank, though, is that for a stretch of about 100 feet, nothing but weeds will grow. I didn't take much notice of this until one day in May when I saw a photograph of the monastery in the newspaper *Vechernaya Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*). The accompanying article said that the monastery was the site of mass graves from the Stalin period; the slopes above the pond were full of bones, a repository for layer upon layer of corpses.

I walked to the monastery and over to the bank. I dug at random with the heel of my shoe. There were bits of bone among the stones and gray earth, though I

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couldn't tell if they were human. They could have been left by dogs. A couple of incredulous residents of a nearby block of flats were doing the same thing.

The article had been written by fifty-nine-year-old Alexander Milchakov, a quiet-spoken journalist-historian whom I had gotten to know two years ago at the founding congress of the Memorial Society, a radical body set up to commemorate the victims of Stalin's repressions. This tenacious investigator has taken upon himself the task of tracking down the people who were removed from the face of the earth by Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, predecessors of today's KGB. He is driven by the memory of his father, Alexander Milchakov, who was head of the Young Communist (Komosmol) League when arrested on Stalin's orders in 1938 and disappeared into the camps for seventeen years, only to be subsequently rehabilitated.

Two years ago Milchakov, who had quietly been collecting data for years from people afraid to speak out, made his first breakthrough. He obtained enough information from elderly people and former NKVD officers to disclose that several thousand victims had been interred at the Kalitnikovski cemetery, beside Moscow's famous pet market. He produced two old women who recalled watching night after night as lorries arrived from the Lubiyanka, the notorious NKVD prison, and naked bodies were thrown into pits by men in rubber aprons. He received evidence that tens of thousands of Party members and army officers had been cremated beside Donskoi monastery. He has recently added three other locations to his list, including the Armenian cemetery not far from the American Embassy. His inquires are leading him to conclude that Moscow is one mass grave.

What made the discovery at the Novospasski monastery different from the others was the special clientele of the NKVD graves. The bank where no trees would grow and other strips of land near the walls contain members of Comintern, the international organization set up to spread communism throughout the world. In the late 1930s the organization's Moscow colleges were ruthlessly purged by Stalin, who thought they represented a threat to his domination of world communism or were inconveniently opposed to fascism at a time when he was preparing a deal with Hitler.

The bodies come from all over the world, according to the evidence in Milchakov's possession—unofficial but convincing enough for *Vechernaya Moskva*. One of them was John Penner, an activist of the American Communist Party who disappeared when studying in the Soviet capital. Here too lie Charles Johnson, John Bennet, and Max Goldfarb from England and the skeletons of Herman Remmele, Fritz Schultke, Herman Schubert, and Leo Fleig, leaders of the group of 842 German anti-fascists arrested in April 1938 in Moscow and never seen again. Also dumped here are Bela Kun, the legendary Communist figure who led a short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. The list includes Dezhe Bokan and Laiosh Madyar, leaders of the Hungarian Party, Vladimir Chopich, secretary of the Yugoslav Communist Party, Marcel Pauker and Alexander Dobrodzhanu of the Romanian Party, Vera Kostisheva, a key figure in the Polish Party, and Edmondo Peluso of the Italian Communists, which lost 120 members in the Moscow repressions.

Several thousand foreign Communists involved in Comintern, Profintern (the Communist international trade union), the Peasants' International, the Young People's International, and the Women's Organization were living in Moscow at the time. Historians believe 90 percent were wiped out. One who survived was Leopold Trepper, the famous Polish Jew who later spied for the Soviet Union in Nazi-occupied Western Europe. He recounts in his book *The Great Game* (published by McGraw-Hill in 1977): "I still have memories from this dark period that time has not erased. At night in our university, where militants from all countries were living, we used to stay awake until three o'clock in the morning. At exactly that hour headlights would pierce the darkness and sweep over the facades of the buildings. 'They're here, they're here.' When we heard that cry, a wave of anxiety would run through the dormitories. Standing at the windows, stomachs knotted with insane terror, we would watch for the cars of the NKVD to stop."

None of the Comintern bodies has yet been dug up, Milchakov told me. The state has shown no inclination to begin exhumations. The KGB has told him that no files exist on the mass graves—though after the latest full-page account of his investigations in the *Vechernaya Moskva* (on July 12) the KGB was shamed into announcing that it had begun its own search for graves and had started interviewing local residents and former NKVD staff.

A team of fifteen volunteers, including students, scientists, and engineers, have begun their own exploratory work at Novospasski monastery and since June 15 have dug more than a dozen holes to a depth of ten feet. "Gradually the monastery is giving up its secrets," said Milchakov, "but we need help badly. We need especially an excavator." *Vechernaya Moskva* has appealed for donations from abroad.

New witnesses have come forward. It's been discovered—nobody knew before—that the monastery was also a prison and place of execution for the Comintern members. According to one former NKVD man called Petrovich, the prisoners would be taken to shower baths that had been rigged up in a church inside the walls. There they were individually washed and measured and then told to sit on a slab. Behind them a tiny window opened and they were shot through the head.

According to Petrovich the NKVD devised an ingenious scheme to disguise the burials from the public. Deep trenches were dug around the monastery and water pipes were laid alongside, as if a utility project were in progress. At night the bodies would be lowered into a trench. They were attached by the throat and legs to planks of wood so they could be arranged

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in compact rows. The pit would be filled in, the pipes moved to a different place, and a new trench dug.

If I take anyone to see the monastery now, it is to gaze at the scene of one of the horrors of Stalin's Russia. I've noticed that even on the warmest weekends this summer, very few people sunbathe near the bank with no trees.

CONOR O'CLERY is Moscow correspondent for *The Irish Times*.

Guillermo Endara's crash diet.

FAT MAN'S BURDEN

By Christopher Dickey

PANAMA CITY

Panama's professional classes look at President Guillermo Endara and despair. "Did you hear about his fast?" asks a lawyer having lunch at the Union Club, haven of the country's traditional elite. A few months after the United States extracted dictator Manuel Noriega and installed Endara, the new president retreated to Panama City's Metropolitan Cathedral for a now-legendary hunger strike. He wanted to identify himself with the plight of the poor, he said. "He was just trying to lose weight," says the lawyer. Among Panama's professionals it was a joke accepted as fact that the president was trimming his rotund frame for the rigors of his wedding night.

And the joke got worse. On June 10 the fifty-four-year-old widower married a twenty-three-year-old student, Ana Mae Díaz Chen, in a public ceremony. Some of his advisers were in a tizzy. A few days before one was heard shouting over the phone to the palace: "Forget the uniform! This country doesn't have any money. We can't be paying for dress uniforms for weddings!" But even without the uniform, emerging from the ceremony into a tropical shower and a blizzard of rice, Endara was radiant. The three things he loved, he said, were "God, the Panamanian people, and Ana Mae." Panama's professionals groaned again.

Sitting in the ornately decorated offices of the Palacio de las Garzas, the president says he couldn't care less. "I'm not particularly interested in the professionals. I'm not particularly interested in the newspapers. I really don't worry when the newspapers publish editorials against me. Very few people in Panama read newspapers." Most important, "the professionals don't count for much in votes." The country's best and brightest may wring their hands, but Endara has a clear sense of the working-class masses he wants to attract. "People understand gestures more than speeches," he says. Going hungry for nearly two weeks and sleeping in the dank heat of the cathedral on a cot were gestures people could relate to—a theatrical populism in the spirit of the man he calls "my mentor," Arnulfo Arias, the Panamanian leader who was elected three times (twice in the 1940s, and again in 1968) and never finished a term. "He was a very strong leader," says the president, "perhaps the strongest leader we've had in this country."

Arias was a fierce nationalist who touched the people's emotions and fired their pride in much the same way Juan Perón inspired Argentina. He came from the traditional oligarchy but had a remarkable common touch. His early policies were xenophobic, even racist. But he ultimately appealed to the entire spectrum of Panama's poor.

The United States never trusted Arias. Washington suspected him of fascist sympathies during World War II and was sure of his hostility toward the U.S.-trained Panamanian military in the decades that followed. The last time he was elected, he held office for only eleven days before his overthrow by Omar Torrijos. But unlike Torrijos and Noriega, who declared themselves leaders and then tried to buy or bully popular support, Arias rode a swell of genuine popular enthusiasm throughout his career. Even as a blind octogenarian in 1984 he was on his way to winning the presidential elections when Noriega fixed the results to keep him out. Rather than see Arias victorious, Washington gave its blessing to Noriega's ploy. The Reagan administration declared the rigged vote in 1984 a step on the way to democracy, invited Noriega's candidate to the White House, and sent Secretary of State George Shultz to the inauguration.

When Arias died in 1988, what was left of his populist mantle fell on the shoulders of Endara, his longtime aide. Affably, even jovially, but quite deliberately, this unassuming lawyer eased himself into the leading role. Trading on Arias's mystique, he became the opposition's presidential candidate, despite the lack of an organized party and the suspicions of the country's elite. "The professionals thought of me as a very bad candidate," he says matter-of-factly. His ticket won by a landslide. "Dr. Arias always said if you look for the presidency you'll never find it," says Endara. "It was practically thrust on me."

Unable to take office as long as Noriega was dictator, Endara and his two vice presidents swore themselves in at an American airbase on the day of the invasion. The irony of being installed with Washington's massive military support was not lost on Arias's heir. "I thought, 'This might look very bad in the history books,' " Endara recalls. "But, what the hell, I have to do what I have to do." And what did Washington think of Arias's heir taking power? According to an Endara aide, "They thought he was not 'unpredictable,' which is what they always called Arnulfo."

Washington could well be wrong. In his avuncular,

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offhand way, as if drifting before the winds of history, Endara is plotting a course that probably will see him through squalls with his present coalition partners and toward a collision with the United States. In the meantime he seems happiest when he is underestimated.

The president and vice presidents are working closely together for the moment, but their parties and their public images are enormously different. The only thing that brought them together in the 1989 campaign was their opposition to Noriega. Like boxers, the three have been given nicknames by the press and the people in the street. Second Vice President Guillermo Ford, made famous by photos of him fending off club-wielding Noriega thugs, has a reputation as a scrapper: "The Raucous Rooster." First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón (no close relation to Arnulfo) has the best-organized political party in the country. He is transparently ambitious and is the darling of the U.S. Embassy. But this austere, intellectual Christian Democrat has no common touch. Noriega mockingly called him "the Mad Nun." Others call him "Dracula" because of his resemblance to horror star Christopher Lee. Endara, apparently squishy and sweet-tempered, is known simply as "*pan de dulce*," which translates loosely as Honey Buns.

GUILLERMO ENDARA BY TAYLOR JONES FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

But the president has a hard edge. A few weeks after his cathedral fast he inscribed a political party called the Arnulfistas. In two days he had 120,000 signatures—from a voting population of only 1 million. The move was a stunning reply to those who had written him off as a man without an organization.

Even as Endara talks glowingly of cooperation among the three executives, he admits: "This alliance may not last the whole term." The two vice presidents are the point men confronting the country's toughest problems. Arias Calderón has the thankless job of transforming Noriega's troops into an honest civilian police force. Ford must try to revive an economy crushed by Washington's anti-Noriega boycott and the dictator's wholesale corruption. The U.S. administration's hard-won assistance for Panama this year, $420 million, doesn't even make up half of the $900 million overdraft that Noriega's cronies ran up at the national bank during the last months of his rule. If, as seems probable, the economy deteriorates, the police lapse into habitual corruption, and the discontent grows on the city's streets, Arias Calderón and Ford may get burned while Endara remains above the fray.

Everyone knows the game and the stakes. They know that by 1994 they'll be running against each other. But no one wants to break from the pack too early. So for now Endara says, "I don't have problems with Ricardo Arias Calderón and Billy Ford at all. As a matter of fact I consider them my best friends." But the rank and file of their respective parties already are jockeying for power.

The game could get rough. On May 1 Panama's streets were buzzing with rumors of a coup attempt. Endara was not in the palace, but his guards, all faithful Arnulfistas, heard that the local equivalent of the FBI was going to stage a putsch backed by Arias Calderón. Several of them congregated at a building near the U.S. Embassy. "We are a reaction force for the presidential palace," they told one American official sent to investigate. Armed with an assortment of weapons worthy of the best Miami gun shops, "they looked like a bunch of Salvadoran guerrillas standing there," the official said later. "The only problem was there was no enemy." In the confusion that followed, one of Endara's guards was accidentally shot and killed by another.

Two weeks later low-flying U.S. helicopters near the palace set off further rumors. Endara was deluged with calls asking if he was under arrest. "People are worried, people are gullible," he explains. Still later, while he was out of the country on a trip to Asia, word reached him that stories of coups were circulating once again. "Finally," he says, "I gave the order: 'If someone attacks the palace, give them the goddamn palace.'" Power resides with him, he says, not with the residence.

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As for the United States, Endara has nothing but pleasant things to say about the government that installed him last December. But Panamanians have never had any clear way to define their nationalism except in opposition to U.S. domination. Endara's mentor had enduring popularity not least because he stood up to the *yanquis* and the army they trained. Torrijos made sovereignty over the canal the centerpiece of his political strategy. Noriega hoped to excuse all his corruption in the name of nationalism—and almost succeeded. Partly thanks to the dictator's bad example, for the moment Endara can cooperate happily with the United States, just as he works with the vice presidents he knows are his opponents-to-be. But Endara learned from his mentor that sooner or later the people he cares about want to see their leaders stand up to the Americans, and he is already staking out his future position toward Washington. "Should the United States meddle," Endara says, "they will find out that I am truly nationalistic."

Toward the end of the interview, Ana Mae comes into his office to pose for pictures. He sits behind his desk. She smooths his lapels, runs her hand over his slick hair, stands behind his elaborately carved chair. "The power behind the throne?" he says with a grin. "Ana Mae's heard that too." He looks at her and smiles. "Just as long as she doesn't believe it."

CHRISTOPHER DICKEY is Paris bureau chief of *Newsweek* and a former correspondent in Central America.

Butts (et al.) vs. butts.

TILTING AT BILLBOARDS

By Ben Wildavsky

Nobody paid much attention, says "Mandrake," when he first covered a cigarette billboard featuring black models with white paint in broad daylight on Chicago's South Side last January. "People probably assumed I worked for the billboard company," says the fifty-five-year-old black professional, known by the pseudonym he adopted years ago for radio call-in shows. Since then Mandrake has become notorious for sparking a nationwide billboard-whitewashing crusade, mostly organized through churches, that encompasses black neighborhoods from Oakland to New York.

Mandrake obliterated his first billboard just days after Louis Sullivan, secretary of health and human services, attacked R. J. Reynolds's new brand of Uptown cigarettes, which was targeted at blacks. Sullivan called for "an all-out effort to resist the attempts of tobacco merchants to earn profits at the expense of the health and well-being of our poor and minority citizens." Reynolds subsequently ditched Uptown, and Sullivan's well-publicized attack, followed by the whitewashing campaign, revived the long-standing fight to keep cigarette and alcohol advertising out of minority neighborhoods. There has already been some success. A number of cities have initiated efforts to ban cigarette and alcohol billboards. Schieffelin & Somerset has canceled all billboard contracts for scotch and cognac in minority areas around the country. And the billboard companies themselves have pledged to help keep cigarette and alcohol ads away from schools, churches, and playgrounds.

But these efforts have not been enough for Mandrake and his followers. Most whitewashers are wary of the motives of the billboard industry and have limited faith in city councils. Fearing First Amendment troubles, cities thus far have typically banned or regulated *all* signs, not specifically those advertising alcohol or tobacco, and they've often done so on aesthetic grounds. Whitewashers say they have nothing against billboards per se—they'd like to see more educational advertising as well as signs for wholesome products such as orange juice. Getting rid of cigarette and alcohol billboards from minority areas—not removing eyesores—is their goal. Drawing parallels to the civil rights actions of the '60s, they say they feel obligated to use civil disobedience to attract attention to their cause.

On a sunny Saturday morning in Harlem in April, the Rev. Calvin O. Butts III stood inside his Abyssinian Baptist Church and spoke in practiced cadences of his audience's "mission of righteousness" and the "corporate evil" they are fighting. Butts is probably the best known of the whitewashers, having orchestrated many well-publicized Saturday morning patrols through the streets of Central Harlem. A special guest this week was Dr. Harold Freeman, director of surgery at Harlem Hospital and co-author of a study finding that men in Harlem have a lower life expectancy than men in Bangladesh, thanks in part to alcohol and tobacco use. "Is it ethical, is it moral," Freeman asked, "to sell [cigarettes and alcohol] specifically to a community that is dying at a much higher rate than others?" Butts then donned a painter's cap and paint-flecked overcoat and, singing "Yield Not to Temptation" ("our battle song"), led his flock out of the church. Up and down the avenues they went, painting signs (with black paint this time, for an Afrocentric twist).

Harlem billboard companies have replaced some of the offending boards. Still dissatisfied, Butts has begun to take "direct action" against tobacco companies. He picketed Philip Morris's New York City headquarters twice in June and once in July.

Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price also got attention when he led a group that whitewashed about twenty-five billboards last March: he was arrested

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and charged with a misdemeanor. (On July 10 Chicago priest Michael Pfleger was also arrested, for allegedly painting billboards and throwing paint at a billboard company employee.) "We'll do it again," Price told me, noting that he's had little success in negotiating with billboard companies. This may not be surprising; Price wants not only a 50 percent reduction in cigarette and alcohol signs in minority neighborhoods but also an advertising discount of "at least 20 percent" to black and Hispanic businesses.

Not everyone in the black community in Dallas agrees with Price's logic. Adolph Hauntz, co-owner of Ruth's Tamale House and president of the Dallas Merchants and Concessionaires Association, said in an interview, "When we broke the law during the civil rights movement, we were trying to get the door open so we could talk to people. . . . The [billboard] industry will respond to dialogue." He cited a recent public service campaign featuring 5,000 signs nationwide that read "Addiction is Slavery." The campaign has cost the industry $5 million in donated space.

Hauntz agrees that there are too many cigarette and alcohol ads in black neighborhoods, but he thinks Price "has lost a broad base of African American support because he's taken a paternalistic approach." Whitewashing signs treats blacks "as if we are a stupid bunch of people that are overly influenced by billboards." NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Hooks has made the same point. In a television interview in March Hooks condemned billboard-whitewashing for "saying that white people have enough sense to read the signs and disregard them and black people don't." Sullivan, for his part, told *The Detroit Free Press* that the charge of paternalism regarding blacks and cigarettes is "bullshit." And the whitewashers and their supporters say that comments like Hooks's simply reflect the tobacco and alcohol industries' success at pre-empting criticism of their minority marketing strategies by making large donations to such groups as the NAACP, the United Negro College Fund, and the National Urban League.

When Butts says his actions conform to "a higher moral law—and that's the law of God," he is appealing to an enormously powerful civil rights tradition. But tempting people isn't the same as oppressing them. Unhealthy as cigarettes and alcohol are, no one has to buy them. And in the absence of coercion from the advertisers, the (coercive) use of civil disobedience seems disproportionate.

It's true, of course, that commercial speech doesn't enjoy the same protected status in America as political expression. There is ample precedent for regulating advertising, even for specific products. Warning labels on cigarette ads have been required by law since 1972. And numerous bills pending in Congress would further tighten regulation of tobacco advertising. But banning ads for specific products, whether through federal or local legislation, exposes another problem: Which products should be excluded? Mandrake is angry that one whitewashed billboard was replaced with an ad for the kind of expensive sneakers that, for some kids, are literally to die for. And a billboard company official complains that overzealous protesters painted over a sign near the Chicago airport advertising electronic beepers to business travelers, presumably because drug dealers often carry beepers. In poor black neighborhoods, where high blood pressure is a serious health problem, should ads for high-cholesterol foods be forbidden?

Though the anti-billboard activists stress a familiar kind of victimology—Butts's campaign explicitly focuses on the notion of sinister (white) corporate forces exploiting the black community—it would be unfair to suggest that they ignore the issue of personal responsibility. There's the personal admonition to "Yield Not to Temptation." And Butts recounts this story: "One brother standing on Lenox Avenue the other day saw us coming by and threw his cigarette away—'You see, Reverend Butts, I'm with you!' " Similarly, Butts's message to children is: "Don't smoke and don't drink—don't even *think* about it! Clean up your *own* community. You have something that *you* can do."

One alternative to covering up these billboards follows from the American political model of countering "bad" speech with "good" speech. California has launched a $28.6 million anti-smoking campaign using money from cigarette taxes. One television ad targeted at blacks features a short, sharp rap: "We used to pick it. Now they want us to smoke it." Colorado and Montana are considering following suit. Similarly, the federal Office of Substance Abuse Policy recently began a nationwide, 7,000-billboard campaign against drug and alcohol abuse.

Anti-billboard activists are on their firmest ground when talking about the vulnerability of children to intrusive billboards, which in minority areas typically feature young, light-skinned, well-dressed blacks who look sexy, sophisticated, and cool. The Outdoor Advertising Association of America, which represents 80 percent of billboard companies, announced a new policy in June encouraging its members to keep billboard ads for products that are illegal to sell to minors at least 500 feet from schools, places of worship, and hospitals. It also recommended that companies establish voluntary limits on the number of boards that advertise cigarettes and alcohol in a given market, i.e., in minority neighborhoods. Gannett Outdoor, the largest billboard company in North America, has started putting decals on all billboards near schools and churches indicating that no alcohol or tobacco ads are to be posted there.

Underlying the whole controversy, of course, is the ever present issue of race. Sullivan's salty dismissal notwithstanding, the notion that blacks as such need special protection from messages urging them to smoke or drink does smack of paternalism. In the end, targeted advertising is less victimization than plain old marketing.

BEN WILDAVSKY is a writer who lives in Washington.

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GROWING NOWHERE

By James S. Henry

JOHANNESBURG

As negotiations between President F. W. de Klerk and the ANC resume in early August, a crucial question on the table is the future structure of the South African economy. Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu have publicly reiterated the ANC's commitment to nationalization and wealth redistribution, whereas de Klerk has pledged that a "free enterprise" economy is "non-negotiable." Both sides have a case. One of the worst legacies of apartheid is an appalling degree of inequality, which creates strong pressures for state intervention. Yet as South Africa and most other African countries have discovered, statist solutions can discourage growth. In fact, Mandela and de Klerk are at the negotiating table largely because apartheid's state capitalist system finally self-destructed.

Of course, the most immediate source of reform was de Klerk's decision last February to unban thirty-four anti-apartheid organizations, free Mandela, and start negotiations. But these moves were really a continuation of an erosion in apartheid's basic structure that started as early as 1973, when John Vorster first permitted blacks to hold some "white" jobs. By 1989, when de Klerk took office, 110 discriminatory laws had already been repealed. Reform did not occur simply because a bright new leader suddenly arrived with fresh ideas and a conciliatory agenda—or, for that matter, because of sanctions or the ANC's armed struggle. It was the culmination of a continuous adjustment to a systemic crisis.

1. By the early 1980s South Africa's engine of growth had already begun to run down. For decades gold generated half of all foreign exchange in South Africa and at least 20 percent of taxes; it was also the largest source of white wealth and black industrial jobs. Corn—"mealies"—was grown by white farmers and provided seasonal work for about a third of blacks. The alchemy was simple: the gold mines combined cheap black labor with cheap coal-fired electricity and overpriced white union labor. Gold, in turn, was exported to pay for First World imports or the technology to make them. Whites consumed the imports and their derivatives. Blacks consumed the mealies. Since blacks were prohibited from owning land, to get the mealies they had to work for either the mines or the farmers.

In the 1970s this formula ran into trouble. After 1971 the price of gold was no longer fixed at $35 an ounce by the International Monetary Fund. At first this seemed a tremendous boon—gold's price soared and so did foreign currency reserves. But South Africa's central bank failed to control the initial influx of reserves, triggering an inflation that continues to this day. Since 1973 inflation has exceeded 10 percent every year, and in 1989 it reached 15 percent. In the 1970s the mines also began to run out of skilled whites, cheap labor, energy, and ore. By 1988 gold output, which had peaked in 1970 at 1,000 tons, was down to 609.

As the mining companies went deeper they required more capital and skilled labor. Because revolutions in the front-line states dried up the supply of migrants, they had to rely on domestic blacks, who increasingly became skilled and formed unions. Coal and electricity costs also rose, following oil prices upward. In the mid-1980s, to generate reserves and keep the mines competitive, the central bank repeatedly devalued the rand, which exacerbated inflation and penalized import-intensive manufacturing. Meanwhile, subsidized by cheap government loans, the country's farms also became more capital-intensive, so there was a shortage of jobs for unskilled rural labor.

All this meant a sharp squeeze on profits, foreign reserves, and tax revenues, plus a rapid rise in structural unemployment. From 1980 to 1990 employment in mining, farming, and manufacturing showed no growth at all, while the labor force continued to expand by about 300,000 workers a year. By 1987 official black unemployment hit 17 percent, and underemployment was twice as high.

2. Apartheid's overhead costs became unbearable. From 1962 to 1985 the public sector's share in the economy jumped from 22 percent to 38 percent, and by 1989 the government employed more than a third of all white South Africa. Much of the budget financed the police, prisons, military, and inefficient state-owned industries. This costly system required the world's highest tax rates, which—unlike rates in most other countries—rose steadily throughout the 1980s.

Meanwhile, efforts to re-tribalize blacks and make them "temporary sojourners" in their own country

JAMES S. HENRY is an economic journalist who writes frequently about developing countries.

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failed miserably. Despite vast sums spent to relocate 3.5 million blacks and encourage industry in the ten homelands, by the 1980s all were bankrupt, and their annual subsidies consumed 9 percent of South Africa's budget. Unemployment among their 13 million pseudo-citizens rose to more than 30 percent. Meanwhile, the other half of the country's 27 million blacks took up residence in townships on the edge of South Africa's cities. In the 1980s this urban black population grew at nearly 7 percent a year, and more than six million of them became squatters. As a result, the pass laws and the Group Areas Act were unenforceable.

3. The internal resistance to apartheid was mounting. In particular, rapid urbanization and restrictions on black property ownership produced an acute housing shortage. Combined with rising unemployment, this made issues like rent levels and the quality of black schools explosive.

From 1983 to 1987 township unrest—including school and rent strikes, massive stay-aways, and nearly 3,000 political killings—reached its highest level ever. It continued despite a four-year state of emergency, 30,000 arrests without trial, the first use of the army in the townships, and government hit squads. By the late 1980s black unions had more than 2.4 million members. In June 1988 COSATU mounted a three-day stay-away that immobilized nearly half the country's workers.

4. Tougher international sanctions were introduced. One can argue endlessly about their impact. South Africa's exports are now stronger than ever. Disinvestment by 160 U.S. firms since 1982 has undoubtedly enriched white South Africans and weakened commitments to affirmative action. And it is certainly fallacious to attribute the entire recent slowdown in the South African economy to sanctions; changes in Soviet policy toward South Africa were at least as influential, because they weakened the old Red menace excuse for apartheid. Yet bank sanctions have clearly been helpful. Here, at least, excessive Third World debt finally did some good. In the early 1980s South Africa borrowed heavily to avoid adjusting to the oil price increase. When gold plummeted in 1985 it became vulnerable to the refusal of banks like Chase to roll over these loans. Given a scarcity of foreign reserves after 1985 and a certain Calvinist commitment to repaying debt, South Africa was forced to contract its economy to maintain a trade surplus and earn reserves.

This "bankers' strike," along with the crisis in the townships, produced severe capital flight. From 1984 to 1989 the economy exported more than $6 billion of capital, including $1 billion of disinvestment by U.S. firms. Indeed, from 1975 to 1989 more than half of net saving went abroad. And the outflow of "human capital"—mainly skilled whites—also increased. A 1987 survey indicated that at least 160,000 white families—nearly 10 percent of the total—were thinking seriously about leaving because of the growing crisis.

Overall the cost of continuing apartheid was becoming prohibitive for whites as well as blacks. One leading economist estimates that the system cost about 2 percent of lost growth each year in the 1980s—nearly half its potential. Over the decade real per capita growth averaged minus 1.2 percent per year, compared with plus 1 percent in the 1970s and 3 percent in the 1960s. Except for mining, the country's capital stock actually declined. Even more to the point politically, while real incomes of employed blacks continued to rise because of unionization, real incomes of whites actually declined in the 1980s. And, as noted, unemployment among unskilled blacks continued to soar. Just to hold unemployment constant the economy had to grow at least 5 percent a year. In 1990-91, however, it is likely to experience zero growth, and per capita income will fall by 5 percent.

It is hardly surprising that such developments broke the logjam in National Party thinking. For decades the party had pursued a strategy of import-, energy-, capital-intensive growth, with little investment in human capital and enormous "social overhead" just to keep the show running. The result was a black population that was poor, semiliterate, unskilled, propertyless, and subject to high rates of infant mortality, illegitimacy, malnutrition, infectious disease, and violence. That population is growing at nearly 3 percent a year, thrice the white rate. By the year 2000 there will be 12 million more blacks, and whites will be outnumbered ten-to-one. As de Klerk told a white audience in early 1990, the police and army could kill 5 million blacks and let blood flow ankle-deep in the streets, but even that would not change such fundamentals.

Of all these problems, by far the most daunting is inequality. South Africa has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world. Three-fourths of the people receive only 30 percent of income. Average white incomes are thirteen times those of blacks, and 60 percent of blacks live below the poverty line. Inequality between rural and urban blacks is also high—with four-to-one differences in income levels.

Wage discrimination accounts for only part of the inequality. Apartheid's main distinction as an economic system is the obstacles it has erected to black capital accumulation. Since the Land Act of 1913 blacks have been unable to own land, private homes, or businesses in 85 percent of the country. Even in the homelands, land ownership is often vested in the tribe. Of the 13 percent of surface land that is arable, individual whites own about 83 percent. Since a third of the 30,000 full-time white farmers account for three-fourths of farm output and urban land ownership is also highly unequal, the concentration of *productive* land ownership is even higher. On the other side of the fence are the third of South Africa's 13 million rural blacks who are landless and unemployed.

Mineral rights and business capital are even more concentrated. The number of black entrepreneurs is minuscule. At the other end of the spectrum, a handful of mining houses and conglomerates dominate domestic

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industry. Interestingly, at least half of corporate wealth appears to be foreign-owned, although these foreign owners may be nominees for white South Africans. Also, an increasing share of their South African-generated wealth is now safely offshore, escaping redistribution.

The education system has had the most devastating effects of all. After forty-five years of "Bantu Christian National Education" the black population remains 60 percent functionally illiterate even in their own vernacular languages. Black schools have low-paid teachers and student-teacher ratios of fifty-to-one or more; per capita expenditures on black students are one-tenth of those on whites. Indeed, more than two-thirds of black teachers have not graduated from high school. Even before the unrest of the 1980s a third of blacks dropped out after four years or less of school, and only 5 percent made it through high school. Since 1983 thousands of black schools have been closed or burned; many youths have spent nearly a decade with no education except radical politics and street violence. So a surplus of illiterate, angry young men exists side-by-side with a shortage of skilled labor, while employers are still busily recruiting skilled workers from places like Hong Kong and Eastern Europe.

There is little dispute about these facts; the question is what to do about them. Here the parties at the negotiating table appear to start out very far apart. But recent interviews with more than a dozen leading economists on both sides reveal that their positions are still pretty ill-defined. The ANC is a broad church. Its "economic desk" was caught unprepared for negotiations: there are only five in-house economists, including three graduate students presided over by Max Sisulu, son of Walter. One left-wing economist who has met the economic desk four times since late 1988 reports that "they did nothing on the economy."

More encouraging is the growing influence of COSATU's Economic Trends Unit, a group of about fifteen trade union economists under the leadership of the University of Natal's Alec Erwin. COSATU's biases are still *dirigiste*—Erwin supports a fuzzy concept called a "low-cost, high-wage" economy and says that "nationalization is likely to play an essential role in dealing with poverty." He believes that the state "should direct investment to specific sectors" and "privatization will have to be reversed." But at least we're not dealing here with 1950s-style central-planning enthusiasts. We're up to 1964, and there is a British Labour Party-style push for a "command economy."

The fact that the unions are involved is a sign of hope—they necessarily have some grounding in empirical reality. For example, most of COSATU's membership works at private companies, which explains why, unlike the ANC, it opposes trade sanctions. ANC moderates may also get some help from other African leaders. For example, Mozambique's Prime Minister Mario Machungo recently declared that "if the ANC were to ask me, I would tell them nationalization is not the way to go."

On de Klerk's side, the economic analysis is a little more sophisticated, but he has not yet come to grips with how to (1) satisfy the ANC's need to deliver a short-term rise in black living standards, and (2) increase future investment and employment, without (3) alienating a majority of white voters. One popular model is the German "social market economy," in which workers participate on corporate boards and get some increased stock ownership over time, while the government spends more on increased education, subsidized housing, and subsidized share purchases. Another model, favored by de Klerk and the neoliberals, emphasizes a smaller state sector, reduced taxes, and privatization—so that, as one cynical ANC supporter puts it, "There will be nothing left to run when we take power."

There may be an effort to finesse some of these issues. For example, "land redistribution" might be acceptable to white farmers if it amounted to a Zambian scheme with ninety-nine-year leases at low rents, or if the government were required to pay full compensation at market prices in an international currency, or if only state land or absentee lands were affected. Some economists also hope that South Africa will become eligible for World Bank loans.

The central question is whether any of these schemes are bold enough. Outside the gates, black demands for some kind of rapid improvement in living conditions are growing. In general, the ANC is struggling to make the transition from a small band of revolutionaries to a broad-based political organization capable of building grass-roots support and formulating serious policies. In striking contrast to Mandela's euphoric reception in the United States and Europe, recent ANC rallies in Cape Town and Soweto have been poorly attended, and the ANC's rivals to its left, the Pan Africanist Congress and "black consciousness" groups, appear to be gaining support. They oppose negotiation and favor even more radical socialist programs. (The head of the largest PAC-backed union recently spoke to me enthusiastically of Ceausescu's ruralization policies in Romania.) Meanwhile, whites are buying guns, applying to emigrate, and joining paramilitary organizations in record numbers, and the actually quite moderate "silent plurality" of blacks, Indians, and Coloureds feels unrepresented by everyone.

Even if the negotiations stay on track, the end of formal apartheid will be no panacea. Depending on how the transition is handled and which economic system is chosen, conditions might well get worse for blacks as well as whites. With its labor force growing so rapidly and the "gold engine" running down, South Africa badly needs a dose of high investment, new technology, and deregulation. Zimbabwe's example is not comforting. Since 1975 its labor force has grown by more than 40 percent, but employment has been stagnant. So far no one has been able to spell out the delicate combination of competitive strategy and redistribution that is required. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Talents, New and Less New

Winter. We are in northern Finland, which looks like a caricature of northern Sweden. Snow and leaden sky. Mining country. In a small cheerless tavern, a middle-aged miner and a younger one are having a drink. The older man says he has had it with life, advises the younger one to get out before it's too late, and gives him the keys to his car. Then the older man goes to the men's room door, pulls out a pistol, loads the chamber, and goes inside. The young man sees all this and does nothing about it. He smokes and sips his drink.

Soon a shot is heard. In a moment—*in a moment*—the young man goes inside to investigate. He sees the body on the floor and leaves. He goes to the shed where the older man kept his car, a Cadillac convertible, and backs it out. As soon as the car is out, the shed collapses.

Thus the tone is set early in **Ariel** (Kino International), a Finnish film written and directed by Aki Kaurismäki. This is Kaurismäki's fifth feature, made in 1988. He is thirty-three and has made two more features since then; and those who know his other work (I don't) say that *Ariel* is a fair sample. It's detached, precise, mocking, laden with a string of little time bombs that go off just a half step behind as the film moves along, laying open the seemingly impassive story with a kind of dread absurdist humor. Life is pretty grim, says Kaurismäki, trying to conceal his amusement at the fact.

Keeping those two views in nice tension, Kaurismäki proceeds with complete confidence in his filmmaking and complete calm in his view of the world. He doesn't propagandize for his view of life; he doesn't expect you to agree. The essence of his belief is that he doesn't care if you agree or not—which sometimes, as in this case, is a strong argument. The adventures of his hero, played equanimously by Turo Pajala, are rather wild but are treated as if they were commonplace. Even if this hasn't happened to you, says the film, it certainly could happen.

Pajala withdraws his savings from the local bank and drives down to Helsinki in his inherited Cadillac. No sooner has he stopped in the city for a hamburger than two muggers spot the wad in his wallet, follow him to a lonely place, and bean him. When Pajala comes to, he accepts that this was just another incident along the way. He doesn't go to the police, he goes to a flophouse, and the next day he looks for a job.

Floating along like a cork on a stream, he meets a woman, Susanna Haavisto, who lives in a more orderly manner but has a comparable attitude. She has at least two jobs, traffic warden and hotel maid, in order to support her small son, but basically she is prepared for anything that happens, even the good things. The sequence in which Pajala and Haavisto meet, dine, go to bed (something like two railroad cars being shunted together in a freight yard), then comprehend next morning that they are serious about each other is better than credible: it comments on all the romantic versions of that sequence that we have seen.

One day Pajala accidentally spots one of the men who mugged him, chases the thief, knocks him down, takes his wallet, and is himself arrested for robbery. He is sentenced—the courtroom looks more chilly than the frozen north—and goes to jail. His cellmate, played by Matti Pellonpää, is another Kaurismäki touch, a quiet bespectacled man with a droopy mustache who looks like a reticent schoolteacher and who is in for manslaughter. In his ruminative way he says that, if released, he would probably kill again. Eventually he and Pajala become friends, plot an escape, and with Haavisto's aid, bring it off.

Pellonpää has connections to help them—along with Haavisto and her boy—get out of the country. Those connections prove treacherous, but at the end, the lovers (now married) and the boy make it. Not until the very end do we learn what the title has to do with the film: it's the name of the ship that is to take them to freedom. So, in a sense, the film moves forward to its title. In the final sequence the escapees are in a small boat making their way across the harbor to the *Ariel* when we hear on the sound track "Over the Rainbow," male voice and chorus, in Finnish. It's the one overtly satirical touch in the picture, and it might be a bit much except that—for us, at least—the sound of Finnish in "Over the Rainbow" changes it from blatancy to cool comedy.

Kaurismäki likes to end sequences with quick fades to black, much like Jim Jarmusch, so it's no surprise to learn that the two directors are friends. (Jarmusch

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Cinema Paradiso. *Still widely available, still offering a good rich slice of Sicilian sentiment built on a boy's love for films and the film theater in his hometown. (Reviewed 2/19/90)* **Pretty Woman.** *Julia Roberts's long legs help her up the road to the stardom that her comic charm deserves. Richard Gere partners her well in this pleasing piffle about an LA hooker and a visiting tycoon. (4/16/90)* **Q&A.** *New York from the underside. Sidney Lumet wrote an unoriginal and lumpy script, but he directed it powerfully, with a powerful cast. (5/21/90)* **Without *You* I'm Nothing.** *Full of sneak punches. It starts as a film of Sandra Bernhard's club act—songs and talk—but before long, weird and fascinating overtones come along, in the act and in the filmmaking. Exceptional. (7/2/90)* **—SK**

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plays a small role in one of Kaurismäki's subsequent films.) The directing of *Ariel* shows what can only be called patience with the story. For instance, a number of times Pajala goes into a room or a building and the camera simply waits outside a few moments for him to reappear, as if what goes on in the room is necessary but uninteresting and the story will pick up again at the right moment. This unflappable quality has a certain impudent charm.

Two questions. One, does everyone in Finland smoke as much as Pajala does in this film? He outfumes Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Breathless*, the previous world champ. Two, do most Finns understand English? At one point we see a TV set showing a Bogart film in English, without subtitles.

Some decades ago, in a play called *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Boris Karloff played a menace, and others in the play kept saying that this menacing man looked just like Boris Karloff. I can't remember an instance since then of a comparable gag until **The Freshman** (Tri Star). Here Marlon Brando plays a Mafia capo in New York with a strong resemblance to Brando in *The Godfather*, and everyone remarks on the resemblance. *The Freshman* is the film that Brando trashed last year and gave as a reason for quitting his profession; the following week he changed his mind. I'm not about to say that he was right the first time—or the second. *The Freshman* is located somewhere in the area that gave him doubts.

Brando himself is at ease in his kingdom, even though it's a much smaller realm than he ought to be ruling. He's especially amusing if you want to watch him gently kid one of his own more synthetic performances. The screenplay by Andrew Bergman, who also directed, is not very good. Ten years ago Bergman wrote *The In-laws*, a farce that ended with a twist that took the sting out of its unconventional premise. Bergman does the same thing here: the complicated plot, which seems to get some nice people in very serious trouble, is revealed at the end as something else, much cozier—and utterly incredible. Retrospectively, it destroys the film we've just seen.

Matthew Broderick plays a young man who comes to New York to go to the NYU film school. No sooner does he step off the train than he gets tangled in a web that makes him one of Brando's employees, and troubles follow. Broderick is much more suited to this part than he was to *Glory*: here, with much less demanded of him, he can do more—in warmth and appeal. He can't overcome the ridiculous cartoon of a film school that Bergman draws; otherwise Broderick and Brando give this protracted sketch whatever diversion is in it. •

Madonna, minx without a riddle.

Unlike a Virgin

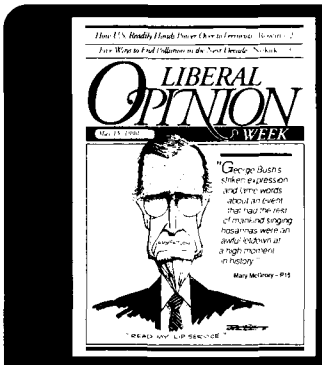
BY LUC SANTE

After two or three months of ceaseless barrage upon the American continent, the winds of Madonna have shifted and besieged Europe. Not that the American public is likely to banish her from memory for even a second, especially since The Movie is playing in every minimall and multiplex and is still being considered from every angle in Sunday supplements throughout the land, and The Album is prominently on display in retail outlets of every demographic. The Tour, however, has left these shores, taking with it the unilateral media saturation that brought Madonna into every room of every house and caused her to hover in the periphery, at least, of every consciousness. Is there anyone, at large or in stir, who does not know the details of Madonna's latest look, with its kewpie-doll ponytail and dominatrix affectations, its nose-cone brassieres and pin-striped suits with breast slits? Or of her stage show, complete with tubular-breasted males, wriggling mermen, and a kickline of Dick Tracies?

Of course, Madonna dwells among us at most times, and her presence is felt in record shops and T-shirt boutiques and on MTV and in the sheets and rags that draw all their material from speculation on the hidden lives of celebrities. But in this late-century version of the dog-and-

LUC SANTE's book about the turn-of-the-century New York demimonde, *Low Life*, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux next spring.

OPINION WEEK



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pony show, her face and body and the attributes of her legend appeared on and in every general-interest magazine and newspaper and magazine-format television program, her name was heard as a reference and a figure of speech in the routines of comedians, the banter of TV news co-anchors, the fulminations of media moralists, in bar-talk and gym-talk and water-cooler-talk and supermarket-line-talk. In the night sky of the American imagination, Madonna looms.

For the time being, at least. Will she endure as a figure to color forever our idea of fame, to become the little picture accompanying the definition of "media star" in the illustrated dictionaries of the future? Will she enter the domain of clip-art imagery as a badly printed blob on shopping bags and paper place mats whose muddy outlines are nevertheless as instantly recognizable as those of the Marilyn of the dress-flipping-up-over-steam-vent or the Brando of the peaked cap and motorcycle jacket?

Such, after all, is her ambition. Madonna is not out for mere money or mere glory; even less is she in pursuit of the perfect beat or the sublime hook. It is not for her to achieve international respect and then disappear into genteel privacy in Switzerland or New Mexico, to define a song or a movie role and then suffer that title's parenthetical accompaniment of her name in every printed citation. She does not want to make her pile and cut out—she does not want to cut out. Madonna wants to conquer the unconscious, to become indelible.

She has already taken steps toward this end. There is, for example, the matter of the single name, which in America is usually an abbreviation conferred by the public over time as an accolade and a sign of affection. Madonna has taken the shortcut of lopping it off herself. And there is the image. In her canny way Madonna realized that in this day and age success results less often from imposing a spectacular figure on the public than from erecting a screen upon which the public can project its own internal movies. So she invented herself as a mutable being, a container for a multiplicity of images. She could be anything, with only the one unchanging grace note: the mole just above her lip.

Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone hails from Michigan, came to New York in the late 1970s or early '80s, studied dance, hung out heavily, began her career as a photographer's model (some mildly dirty pictures from this period surfaced a few years ago, and some of the tabloids were weak-minded enough to think they could make a scandal out of them), appeared in a small role in at least one low-grade exploitation movie, and then began making a name as a "track singer" (a lost term from that brief interregnum between live performance and the total electronic environment, referring to vocalists who appeared in clubs singing to taped accompaniment).

On the New York club scene she appears to have gone from decorative nobody to new face on the rise in a sort of Ruby Keeler minute. She persuaded Mark Kamins, a deejay at Danceteria, the club of that hour, to produce a song for her ("Everybody"), then persuaded Seymour Stein, the godfather of New York "new wave," to issue it on his Sire Records label, and it hit the charts. In those days (1982), when Reaganism was still young, dance-party records made by ambitious white semi-bohemians might be viewed as artistic and even political statements merely by virtue of their genre. By eschewing rock-'n'-roll jingoism in favor of bass out front, wide backbeat, and lyrics that in essence always said, "Let's everybody party down," they made a gesture of calling out to the whole world, especially to its third part. It was a year or two before this stance became generic.

So it was that Madonna's early records, blasting out over such stations as WBLS in New York, stations that were then just beginning to be referred to by the demographic euphemism "urban contemporary," sounded like more than mere product. The very simple lyrics of her second 45, "Holiday" ("We should take a holiday, some time to celebrate . . ."), had a utopian flavor, however soft. Her voice, with its nasal tough-girl inflection by Ronnie Spector out of Minnie Mouse and related by blood or marriage to the throw-down quality exuded by such chanteuses as Teena Marie and Evelyn "Champagne" King, made the invitation sound uncompromising, almost brave. After three or four hits in succession, Madonna was a downtown singer with proven crossover ability.

Still, the likelihood of her achieving any further distinction seemed remote. Madonna, however, was not one to accept any predetermined view of her career. She immediately raised the stakes, and in rapid order began advancing one marketing theme after another, in the process revealing that while she had a small talent as a pop singer, as an image strategist she possessed something approaching genius. Her first order of business was to jettison the appealing but limited waif look featured on the cover of her eponymous first album, to replace its whisper with a shout. For this purpose she initiated a hostile takeover of the sartorial repertoire of her older rival Cyndi Lauper, an original who had taken the hippie-punk scavenger aesthetic to an extreme point and assembled herself as a living collage of old and new styles, clashing colors, mismatched fabrics, accessories contrived from the most unlikely objects.

Madonna, of course, was no original; she was, like her role model David Bowie, a magpie with a flair for highlighting the critical elements of the styles she appropriated. She dispensed with the self-mockery implicit in Lauper's presentation and zeroed in on its fetishistic sexual aspect. Hence the bras-as-outerwear, the "Boy Toy" belt buckles, the junk jewelry by the pound. The look titillated boys of all ages, while teenage girls found in it a form of rebellion that could be safely assumed and doffed outside parental ken, since it involved nothing drastic or irreversible. The look instantly propelled Madonna into the national image bank. She had taken her first beachhead.

A measure of the success of this image was that it lasted much longer in the consciousness of the public than it did in Madonna's own career. Its early crudity can be assessed in her "Virgin Tour" video, which shows her looking askew and even a bit chunky, missing notes and flailing around on stage, but evidently learning on the job. This, however, was her live show. At the same time, she was displaying a precocious understanding of the nascent power of the video clip, becoming one of the first pop stars to issue songs that were inseparably entwined with the visual imagery of their MTV illustrations in the minds of consumers.

Her first successful salvo in this direction was "Like a Virgin." "Should go over big in Italy," quipped a friend of mine at the time; sure enough, the video was shot in Venice, and it contained the first glimmers of her now-trademark Catholic-transgression sideline. Of course, it also possessed all of the grace of a "Girls of the Adriatic" *Playboy* feature, along with the patented MTV significance-trigger of staggering slo-mo; but it can be said to have made its point. Her follow-up was "Material Girl," which may have sounded a bit like Carmen Miranda. What everybody noticed, however, was the video, in which Madonna shamelessly reinvented the wheel, lifting wholesale Marilyn's courtroom dance sequence from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and flushing it of its satire. Subtlety, Madonna well knew, butters no parsnips in the pop marketplace. "Material Girl" was crass, vulgar, obvious, charmless, and virtually definitive of the grasping zeitgeist of 1984. It was, naturally, her biggest hit to date, and probably remains so.

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Around the same time she was fortunate enough to be handed an opportunity well beyond her own contrivance. Susan Seidelman, a little-known but enterprising filmmaker apprenticing, as Madonna had, in the Manhattan bohemia career institute, cast her in *Desperately Seeking Susan* as the mystery woman of the title. The film was halting, turgid, and as instantly irrelevant as any Gidget vehicle. But in its tame exploitation of the downtown-scene mystique it somehow rang the safe-rebellion chime for millions of middle-class youth. Madonna was ideally suited to her role, which called for her to look sultry and jaded and not say a whole lot. The movie earned many times its budget, its title entered the catch-phrase arsenal of headline writers everywhere, and Madonna emerged from the experience having attained a new rung of celebrity, along with a reputation, soon shown to be utterly unfounded, as a major box-office attraction.

The rest, as they say, is history. She married the troubled Sean Penn and succeeded in profiting from his bad press, appeared in a couple of cinematic bombs (*Shanghai Surprise* and *Who's That Girl?*, in case you've forgotten) that did not leave her terribly scathed, issued many song-and-video packages that each involved a new look and a new attempt at a veneer of meaning, made a stab at artistic respectability by appearing in a sub-par David Mamet play, raised middle-American hackles with further Catholic-transgression affectations in the "Like a Prayer" video and with a mock-Sapphic Mutt-and-Jeff talk-show routine with Sandra Bernhard, promptly began being seen with Warren Beatty in as many simultaneous locations as Saint Anthony of Padua, and then embarked on an entirely new round of publicity with The Tour, The Movie, and The Album.

This dawn broke in early spring, as the tour started in Japan and immediately began spinning off magazine spreads. The stage show looked scary in these pictures, a late-modernist casino spectacular involving elements from the Cabaret Voltaire, Salvador Dali's 1939 World's Fair show, *A Clockwork Orange*, Ken Russell movies, and the Alternative Miss World pageant. Madonna's hairstyle, for which she acknowledged the influence of the mid-1960s "Tressy" doll (you squeezed her stomach and pulled an endless lock through a hole in the top of her head), at the same time suggested styles current on late-night cable-TV commercials for Dial-a-Mistress. The Jean-Paul Gaultier outfits were similarly daunting, redolent of Brunhilde and Attack of the Amazons and the homey-sinister allure of the 1950s bondage accoutrements immortalized in those little

MADONNA BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

books published by Irving Klaw. Has she gone too far this time? you were supposed to ask.

The show itself was a wink and a nudge, a dance number and a blackout routine. Indeed, in its erotic display it was probably one of the most traditional stage shows to follow the circuit since everybody stopped wondering who killed burlesque. The degree of sexuality present in its set pieces was entirely allusive, twice-removed, and all but obliterated by the massive inverted commas that enclosed every aspect of the production. As a spiritual heir to Barnum, Madonna was in essence executing her version of the sign he famously put up reading "This Way to the Egress," which lured scores of people with active imaginations and small vocabularies right out the door.

For the record: she mock-kicked her female dancers around the stage while insulting them and complaining about the New York attitude (or at least that was the line at the Nassau Coliseum), mimed sodomizing various parties (though you would have missed the allusion had you been thinking Ziegfeld), allowed herself to be mock-ravished by male dancers gotten up as eunuchs during a faux-Oriental version of "Like a Virgin" and by an unseen deity while she struck ecstasy-of-Saint-Teresa poses during "Like a Prayer." There was also a song (included on the current album) whose lyrics and production number were devoted to spanking. Oh, yes, and there were those male dancers adorned with breasts that flopped like so many pairs of flaccid phalli while her own set looked like armor-plated projectiles.

There might be said to be a recurring theme here. If truth be told, Madonna herself does not precisely exude sexuality. What she exudes is more like will, iron self-discipline, and, of course, punctuality, that courtesy of monarchs. In her "Ciao, Italia" video, decked out in various gymnastic outfits and body-pumping to the screams of tens of thousands in a soccer stadium in Turin, Madonna looks perfectly able to make the trains run on time. (Do not mistake this for an ethnic slur: her last name could just as easily be O'Flanagan and the setting Oslo or Kalamazoo.) Between the teasing simulation of carnality and the real passion for efficiency lies Madonna's bona fide erotic territory.

All the sexual imagery in the show, behind its rococo and vaudeville trappings, was single-mindedly fixated on power and its representations. The reason that Madonna does not possess much intrinsic sexual appeal, in spite of having raided the symbolic vanity cases of every icon from Harlow to Dietrich to Hayworth to Monroe (and throwing in

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Elvis for good measure), is that she lacks any trace of vulnerability, a quality that, it should be noted, is essential to the charms of both sexes. Pout and pant and writhe though she might, Madonna is not sexually convincing because her eyes do not register. They are too busy watching the door.

If, at this point, there is any aspect of Madonna's act that seems independent of calculation, it is her preoccupation with the Catholic mysteries. Just such treading of the line between sacred and profane in the "Like a Prayer" video, you will recall, curtailed her lucrative career as a Pepsi-Cola spokesmodel. It seems there was this thing that happened between her and (apparently) Saint Martin de Porres, and then she acquired a case of stigmata, and then . . . Somehow various people took offense at this rather conventional set of images straight out of the Symbolist fakebook and put pressure on her corporate sponsors to suppress a commercial that by all accounts (it was broadcast exactly once) featured a very different, rather family-oriented storyline, even though it was set to the same tune as the video. This incident did not, however, prevent Madonna from including in her stage show a routine suggesting a musical-comedy version of *The Devils of Loudun*, complete with candles, crosses, stained glass, censers, and dancers garbed in mini-cassocks. While it makes for natural theater and automatic naughtiness, and comes equipped with a rich vocabulary of props, costumes, and buzzwords, it is also, how shall we say, parochial, an odd liability for one attempting so earnestly to cover as broad a consumer base as possible.

Perhaps the whiff of scandal accounts for the gusto with which Madonna throws herself into the exploitation of sacerdotal iconography. During her tour in Toronto, plainclothes cops put in an appearance, apparently following up a complaint of lewdness, and although they took no action, Madonna's parent company, Warner Bros., took the incident and ran with it, generating even more publicity from a non-case of censorship manqué. This occurred, with superb commercial timing, within a week of a more serious occasion: the action by the Broward County (Florida) sheriff's office to ban sales and performances of 2 Live Crew's witless but entirely traditional party record. A week or two after that, the National Endowment for the Arts chose to disregard the advice of its own nominating panel and withheld funds from four performance artists whose very earnest and noncommercial work happens to address the concerns of sexual minorities. Meanwhile, in Italy, Madonna succeeded in garnering more publicity from condemnations of her act by religious authorities, and their disapproval either affected ticket sales or provided a cover for sluggish trade. Presumably, Madonna is now free to title her next opus *Like a Martyr*.

And what of the other two legs of Madonna's media-assault troika? The album, *I'm Breathless*, is a departure for her, although not necessarily a very good idea. It functions as a sort of subsidiary sound track tie-in to *Dick Tracy*, and three of the songs included are featured in the movie. The whole is therefore imbued with a 1930s pastiche quality (all except "Vogue," which is fairly generic dance music but possesses considerably more vigor than any of the other tracks). But the current idea of what the 1930s sounded like bears about the same relation to the real thing as the kind of music that is played by men wearing straw boaters and candy-striped shirts and is called "Dixieland" bears to New Orleans jazz.

Whatever interest the songs might themselves contain is disfigured by an excess of cute fillips, the sort of fripperies that at the time were restricted to novelty records. The three songs appearing in the movie are by Stephen Sondheim, which is fine if you happen to share that kind of taste, although it should be pointed out that his penchant for chromatic eccentricities does no favor to Madonna, whose limited vocal equipment is inadequate to the task at hand. As yet another attempt to expand her horizons, this move by Madonna seems ill-advised, as it neither bears her triumphantly into a new area nor capitalizes on her actual strengths—but the thing currently sits at No. 4 on the charts, so who is to say?

The impossibility of second-guessing the vagaries of the American public is emphasized by the appearance of *Dick Tracy*, a film graced by moments of enormous pictorial beauty that otherwise lurches woodenly along—a Red Grooms construction devised by computer or committee—and yet is the hit movie of the summer. Madonna plays one of the four principal roles not calling for grotesque facial prostheses, although

Aftermath: 1956

In later years I woke so often
in that monster's twisted position
I thought he was the key—
his fear of women and his longing
for them as he hovered at the edge
of the lake covered with radioactive fog
where they bathed. . . ;
that monster with a monster's appetite
and a man's precise, fastidious desire,
howling, as a stranger now, for a woman
he loved before fallout
from the bomb put barky fur on his body
and added horns to his head.
The monster wanted to die if he could not love.

It has taken me this long
to realize that what kept me awake nights
for years after the movie of the end
was something—my life—which had preceded it.
The waste landscape on the screen
wasn't so different from the landscape I entered that night:
great gaping groves of elms,
the milky scurf of space stretching nowhere,
the prairie heaving on all sides,
the broken seated theater running
The Day the World Ended—
shot in a dingy low budget black and white—
on the darkened shut down Main Street
in Chicago Heights.

Mark Rudman

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Breathless Mahoney is an animated graphic with all the soul of a rubber stamp. Madonna's job is to look, once again, sultry and jaded. Unfortunately she has been given entirely too much to say, and even though her lines consist of strung-together femme fatale clichés sampled and resequenced from somebody's memory of the works of Mae West, poor Madonna does not manage even a cartoonish conviction. She simply utters, and the lines fall from her mouth and drop on the floor. "I was wondering what a girl had to do to get arrested," she says, with the same inflection she might use to convey her intention of seeing if the mail has arrived.

Madonna, then, is a bad actress, a barely adequate singer, a graceless dancer, a boring interview subject, a workmanlike but uninspired (co-)songwriter, and a dynamo of hard work and ferocious ambition. She has thus far been brilliant at imposing herself on the attention of the world, but there is no telling how long she can keep it up. Her pool of ideas, derived from a diligent study of iconology, is limited. There are only so many more myths she can recut to her fit. Her ability to titillate will wane with time; there is a certain age past which pop stars need to affect a serious demeanor or else find another line of work, and perhaps *I'm Breathless*, for all its many teases, represents a rehearsal for this eventuality, a record made for people who stay home at night.

Actually, it is entirely possible that Madonna will be able to coast from wild youth into eminence without an inordinate amount of exertion. To judge by the audience at her recent stage shows, the largest part of her constituency is made up of teenage girls who may not think she's a genius but admire her as a workhorse and a career strategist (and because she scares teenage boys). To these consumers she is already a fixture, who may ultimately be accorded the sort of permanent landmark status currently enjoyed by enigmas like Bob Hope. For the remainder of the public, much of Madonna's success to date has resulted from her function as a readymade, albeit a very self-willed readymade. If other decades possessed their blond bombshell superstars, is it not fitting that the present era should have one of its own? From this perspective, Madonna is a star the way Ivory is a soap and Broadway is a street. But while endurance comes naturally to statues, it requires speed and fluidity of humans, and in ever increasing amounts. Madonna cannot afford to sleep. •

Years of Iron

BY BERNARD KNOX

Ovid's Poetry of Exile
translated by David R. Slavitt

(Johns Hopkins University Press, 256 pp., $32.50, $12.95 paper)

The Last World
by Christoph Ransmayr

(Grove Weidenfeld, 240 pp., $18.95)

Writers have often had to do their work in exile. Thucydides, Dante, Machiavelli, Byron, Heine, Hugo: the list is long and illustrious, and our century has seen it swollen to gigantic proportions by the mass emigration of German intellectuals in the 1930s, and by the flight of the dissidents from the Soviet empire in recent decades. Most of these writers exchanged a tyranny that could tolerate them no longer for a relatively free society; the exile could hope to obtain, in Gibbon's words, "in a happier climate, a secure refuge, a new fortune adequate to his merit, the freedom of complaint and perhaps the means of revenge." Such opportunities were denied those condemned to internal exile: Lenin in Siberia under the czar, Trotsky in Alma Ata under Stalin, Sakharov in Gorky under Brezhnev. Lenin and Trotsky eventually found their way to Western Europe, and even for Sakharov there remained the possibility that he might in the end, like Solzhenitsyn, be expelled (though he would probably have refused to go.)

For a citizen of the Roman empire, however, banishment was a dead end. "The empire of the Romans," Gibbon again, "filled the world, and when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies." Beyond the frontier lay death at the hands of hostile barbarians; on the frontier itself, primitive conditions and constant danger. And it was to a troubled frontier that the emperor Augustus, in A.D. 8, banished one of the most famous citizens of Rome, the poet Publius Ovidius Naso—Ovid, to the English-speaking world, though in his poems, because of metrical constraints, he always refers to himself as Naso.

Ovid was not an exile, technically speaking, for *exsilium* normally involved loss of citizenship and confiscation of property. He was "relegated" (*relegatus*) to a particular place in the empire, where he was to stay at the emperor's pleasure. Others—some unruly members of the imperial family, for example—had been "relegated" to the Mediterranean islands close to Rome, but Ovid's fate was to languish, for the remaining nine years of his life, at Tomi, site of the modern Romanian city of Constanta. It was situated on the Danubian frontier of the recently pacified province of Moesia, facing east on the Black Sea. Moesia was the Siberia of the Roman empire. "I've stopped for a drink," Ovid writes, in David Slavitt's brilliant adaptation:

> . . . and hardly even remarked
> as the innkeeper peeled away the wineskin
> to leave the wine
> standing, frozen, in what was the
> wineskin's shape.
> He hacked me a chunk of wine to drink or,
> rather, suck on
> as it thawed in my mouth.

The emperor's choice of the place for Ovid's banishment was exquisitely cruel. The playboy of Augustan Rome, who had written the *Amores*, a witty, audacious chronicle of his fictitious love life with Corinna (not to mention her maid), who had followed that with the even spicier *Ars Amatoria*, a handbook for the seducer of Roman wives, and had recently used the epic hexameter of Ennius's *Annals* and Virgil's already classic *Aeneid* to sing the loves and changed shapes, the *Metamorphoses*, of legendary heroes and heroines—this was the man condemned to spend the last years of his life in a Roman equivalent of Fort Apache:

> The country here is grotesque, the
> people savage,
> the weather awful, the customs crude, and
> the language a garble . . .
> . . . Tomi was once a Greek city
> but the Greeks are not stupid and

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most of them left.
Then the Getae moved in, barely pacified, barely
civilized. One sees them scamper about,
bareback, quivers and bows on their backs, their arrows dipped
in venom, their faces covered over with hair. . .
. . . They all carry knives at their belts
and you never know whether they're going to greet you or stab you.
. . . Among such people
your old friend, Ovid, the dancing-master of love,
tries to keep from hysterical laughter and tears . . .

The reasons for Ovid's punishment are still a mystery, a favorite theme for scholarly speculation. We have no information except what Ovid himself tells us, or rather, hints at cryptically, in the poems he wrote at Tomi and sent back to Rome: the *Tristia* (*Sorrows*) and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Letters from the Black Sea*). He speaks of two reasons: *carmen*, a song, and *error*, a word that can mean a simple mistake, a moral lapse, or a temporary derangement of the mind. The song, for which he often apologizes at length in the poems from Tomi, is the *Ars Amatoria*. It was a saucy defiance of Augustus's program of moral reform, his vain attempt to restore, by propaganda and legislation, the legendary family virtues of the early Roman republic. (The closing lines of the poem, for example, give explicit directions to the ladies on the position for intercourse best suited to their complexions and figures; and the preceding lines make it clear that the last person for whose delectation these positions are to be assumed is the lady's husband.)

But this poem cannot have been the immediate cause of Augustus's harsh sentence; the *Ars Amatoria* had been in circulation for ten years or so. It must have been the *error* that brought the emperor's resentment to the boiling point and launched Ovid on the long journey to Tomi. All we know, from the poet's vague hints, is that his *error* was not anything that he did: it was something he saw, should have reported, and failed to do so. In the year that Ovid's sentence was pronounced, A.D. 8, a conspiracy in high places against Augustus had been exposed. Ovid may have been tangentially involved. Whatever the nature of his *error*, it was clearly one that mortally offended the imperial ruling family; Augustus remained deaf to Ovid's eloquent appeals until his death in A.D. 14, and his successor, Tiberius, left Ovid to live, die, and be buried in the frozen snow of Tomi.

These poems of Ovid, the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, are unique in the literature of exile. They contain no protest against the regime that has imposed so cruel a penalty, no disclosure of its shameful secrets, no satire of its ruler or his ministers. The poems are all, from first to last, appeals, in one form or another, for clemency, or for help in obtaining it. They ask at first for permission to return to Rome, and later, as hope wanes, for removal to some more civilized place of exile. They contain fulsome compliments to Augustus and other members of the imperial family, contrite admissions of guilt (discreetly worded so as to conceal whatever state secret Ovid had stumbled on), and detailed rehearsals of the hardness of his lot in the brutal life of a barely pacified province.

The verdict of the critics has not been enthusiastic. Gibbon speaks of Ovid's "just, but unmanly lamentations." According to the authoritative Teuffel-Schwabe *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, "His flattery and adulation surpass all bounds." A "*délire d'adulation*," says Boissier; and Mackail finds the poems "a melancholy record of flagging vitality and failing powers." But these complaints about flattery and adulation do not sit well on the lips of scholars comfortably at home in their studies. "Our century," as Slavitt points out in his prefatory note, "has, to our shame, better prepared us to understand capriciousness and violence." And though Ovid's themes do sound repetitious in the later letters from the Black Sea, as hope for reprieve dims and finally dies, the verses are still elegant, and the matter often fascinating—as, for example, his account of the poem he wrote in the local Getic language and recited to an audience of tribesmen, who greeted it with prolonged murmurs and a rattling of the arrows in their quivers.

In the earlier poems, the *Tristia*, there are some of the best things Ovid ever wrote. Here he is no longer the dashing rake of the *Amores*, the drill sergeant of seduction of the *Ars Amatoria*, or the epic singer of changing shapes of the *Metamorphoses*. He writes in his own suffering person to friends in Rome, to Augustus himself (a poem of 578 lines), and, in compassionate tones of consolation and encouragement, to the wife, who had stayed in Rome, at his insistence, to safeguard his property and work for his return. Among the many jewels of the collection are Ovid's account of his last night in Rome (I, 3), his autobiography (IV, 10), and his many graphic descriptions of the climate, flora, fauna, and inhabitants of Tomi.

These poems are not just complaints and appeals for clemency. They are Ovid's weapons, the only weapons he has in his campaign for reprieve, or at least for mitigation of his sentence. Dispatched to Rome at intervals, they were copied and widely circulated. Ovid was on the imperial blacklist—his books were removed from the three great public libraries of Rome—but he was still Rome's most famous and admired living poet. His hope must have been that public opinion would eventually influence Augustus in the direction of clemency, and in this he may have been successful, for he tells us (*E.P.* IV, 6.25) that Augustus had begun "to forgive the fault that I committed in error." If so, Augustus died before he could act on his change of mood. But there is something more, in these exquisitely stylish poems, than a strategy to win public support and an imperial reprieve. There is, in these poems, a pride in the supremacy of poetry, in its independence of power, of time and change—a sort of quiet defiance of earthly power, even the power in Rome that ruled the entire civilized world, that had sent him to the end of that world, and that could, if it so desired, take his life at any moment:

. . . It's only the blessings of heart and mind
that ever endure. In those you should put your trust.
I offer my own example. You know how much
I lost when I was sent away into exile.
Ruined!
But see what I still have, my mind, my work.
Unless he put me to death, not even Caesar can take
this from me or banish me from this.

"The *Tristia*," wrote E. J. Kenny in his splendid chapter on Ovid in the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, "have been criticized as abject; in some respects they show Ovid as bold to the point of foolhardiness."

Ovid wrote his poems from exile in the same meter that he had used for the *Ars Amatoria*, the characteristic elegiac couplet of Latin erotic elegy, the meter of Tibullus and Propertius. It is a meter that poses difficult problems for a translator: a hexameter followed by a shorter line, the pentameter, the feet defined not by the incidence of stress but by length of syllable. Length of syllable is not a significant factor in English versification, and attempts to reproduce the Latin metrical pattern by marshaling stresses result in verses of mechanical rigidity. Coleridge's imitation of Schiller's famous

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elegiac couplet uses stress to accent the Latin metric:

In the hexameter rises the fountain's
silvery column.
In the pentameter aye falling in
melody back.

This is ingenious, but a succession of even twenty of such couplets (and Book II of the *Tristia* has over 200) would produce the effect of a hi-fi tone arm stuck on the same musical phrase. In the Latin, the pattern of long and short syllables is played off against the natural stresses of the words. In the hands of Ovid, the elegiac's grand master, the couplets are a virtuoso series of rhythmic variations. English translators, forced to work with stress alone, must at all costs avoid the lockstep of Coleridge's paradigmatic couplet.

Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, parts of which were first published in 1919, took the bull by the horns. Two elegiac couplets of Propertius emerged as

When, when and whenever death closes
our eyelids,
Moving naked over Acheron
Upon the one raft, victor and conqueror
together,
Marius and Jugurtha together,
one tangle of shadows

Magnificent as it is, this preview of the free verse of the *Cantos* is no solution; the Propertian spirit is there, but no lingering trace of the form. In any case, Pound's creative adaptation was greeted with such contempt and vituperation by the classical establishment that subsequent translators of elegy retreated to the eighteenth-century Augustan standby, the rhymed heroic couplet, which, as Guy Lee remarked in his 1968 translation of the *Amores*, "lacks the variety of elegiacs and is haunted by the ghosts of Dryden and Pope—not to mention the Pantomime Good Fairy." Lee chose what he calls "free verse." Sometimes he catches the tone and suggests the form with remarkable success, as in the opening distich of *Amores* ix*b*:

Offered a sexless heaven I'd say *No thank*
you
women are such sweet hell.

But often the lines are much too short, and he even goes so far as to ignore at times the brute fact that in the Latin couplet the first line is always, and must always be, longer than the second. In 1982 Peter Green, with warm acknowledgment of Lee's pioneering effort, improved on the model in his *Ovid: The Erotic Poems*, a masterly translation of the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and some shorter poems in the same category. He used a first line with "a loose six-beat (occasionally five-beat) line . . . ," representing the pentameter with "a variable, short-stopped line with anything from five to three main stresses":

It was you, no doubt about it, Graecinus.
I always remember
How you said no man could possibly
fall in love
With two girls at once. I believed you. I
dropped my defenses.
Result—double love-life. Embarrassing. All your fault.

David Slavitt uses a similar metrical pattern of two lines with eleven stresses. It is, he says in his introduction to his earlier, separate version of the *Tristia* (1986), "the adaptation Auden used" (in "Prospero to Ariel," for example). Slavitt is comfortably at home in this verse form (he used it before in a translation of five elegies of Tibullus), and from the beginning to the end of the 250 pages of this version of Ovid's poems from Tomi, the lines retain their suppleness and variety. The voice of the speaker, moreover, remains consistent. This is a real, and fascinating, human being we are listening to.

A word of warning, however. Slavitt has assumed large powers as Ovid's twentieth-century voice. "Ovid's habit of piling up mythological examples and parallels," he says, "can get wearisome for the modern reader, and when this happens I invent what I need, usually reducing the number of references or sometimes enlarging upon something else in the poem." In order to achieve "urbanity and modernity," he claims, "a translator must have at least the illusion of parity, must suppose himself to be the collaborator if not an actual pal of the poet who wrote the original work." Sometimes, however, the collaborator (perhaps it is the pal) grabs the ball and runs far ahead of his partner as he races toward modernity. As in this version of part of *Tristia* I, 3, the account of Ovid's last night in Rome:

The nimble hours skittered, turning us all
clumsy
and the simplest menial task
onerous. Packing
was either a nightmare itself or one of
those cruel jokes
you sometimes find in your worst
dreams. Papers
hid and even after we'd found them
refused to stay put.
We blamed ourselves for having
wasted time
trying to talk it out and ourselves into
understanding
what was going on, and not to
impose
what we were feeling. I'd made lists of
clothing, equipment . . .

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But who had the composure? And pitiless time
nudged us along, forcing our minds to these cruel questions.
Or was it, perhaps, a mercy? We managed to laugh
once or twice, as my wife found in some old trunk
odd pieces of clothing. "This might be
just the thing this season, the new Romanian mode . . ."
And just as abruptly our peal of laughter would catch
and tear into tears as she dropped the preposterous shepherd's cloak
and we held each other . . .

The only basis in Ovid's text for this admittedly moving passage, however, is the four lines 7-10, which run, in a bare prose version: "There had not been time for getting ready what was suitable, nor the mind for it, either; our hearts had been numbed by the long delay. I took no thought for the slaves, for selecting companions for the journey, or for the clothes and equipment a banished man would need."

Yet, though no one should quote this version as Ovid without checking the Latin text, Slavitt has done Ovid a service. He has brought back from the limbo to which insensitive critics had relegated it a book that cries out for translation. His version will win new readers for the poet who even in the depths of despair never lost his elegant facility, his virtuoso touch for the rhythms of his medium or, above all, his proud conviction that his poetry would survive him:

Now I have done my work. It will endure
I trust, beyond Jove's anger, fire and sword
Beyond Time's hunger. . .
I shall be read, and through all centuries
If prophecies of bards are ever truthful
I shall be living always.

This prophecy, from the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses*, may well have been one of the final touches that Ovid added to his great poem in exile at Tomi.

Six of the letters from the Black Sea (and possibly two in the *Tristia*) are addressed to one Maximus Cotta, an admirer and close friend of the poet. He is the principal character of Christoph Ransmayr's strange and haunting novel, *The Last World*, which describes a fictional journey by Cotta to Tomi in search of Ovid, rumors of whose death have reached Rome. This is not, however, a conventional historical novel, as its deliberately flaunted anachronisms make clear. Slavitt allows himself an occasional playful modern touch—the Tomi Chamber of Commerce, for example, and Ovid expecting galley proofs—but in *The Last World* we very soon come up against billboards, firing squads, newspapers, sauerkraut, diesels, projectors, and can openers; ships on the Black Sea have smokestacks, Jason's *Argo* has a gun deck, and Thiess, one of the inhabitants of Tomi, is a German veteran of the Wehrmacht's campaign in the Crimea who remembers the people crowded into the gas chambers.

Ransmayr, born in Wels, Austria, in 1954, sees the Roman world of Ovid through the dark filter of Eastern Europe's twentieth-century agony. In the fifteen chapters of his novel (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has fifteen books), past and present are fused in a timeless blur—just as they are at the end of Ovid's epic, when the transformations of primeval Greek and later Roman mythical figures culminate in the near-contemporary murder of Julius Caesar and the transformation of his spirit into a comet that blazed for seven nights while his adopted son Octavius, later to be Augustus, presided over the games that honored his memory in 44 B.C.

Cotta is searching not only for Ovid, but also for his magnum opus, the *Metamorphoses*. Roman audiences had so far heard only enigmatic excerpts read aloud by the poet himself; they had no conception of the work as a whole. And Ovid had burned the manuscript during his last night in Rome. (In fact, though Ovid does speak of burning the manuscript, he also mentions the existence of copies in circulation and claims only that they lack the author's final touches.) All Ransmayr's Cotta finds, in the end, are fragments of the poem, written on rags and inscribed on stones that are covered with slugs, but long before he makes any sense of these fragments, he comes to know the inhabitants of Tomi, a town that consists of crumbling, rusting ruins.

He never does find Ovid (who is presumably dead), but, though he does not immediately realize it, he has found in the strange characters that haunt the stones and hovels of Tomi the originals of the figures that appear in Ovid's poem. Ransmayr is playing games with his readers here. Cotta never finds more than tiny fragments of the poem, but we have it all, and can see that Ransmayr is transforming Ovid's mythical figures into denizens of his timeless, nightmare city. Pythagoras, for example, the Greek philosopher who in Ovid's poem proclaims the doctrine of eternal change and of the soul's passage through different shapes, is here a half-crazed man who used to be Ovid's servant and now stands outside the town butcher's shop preaching abstinence from meat. The brutal Thracian king Tereus becomes the town butcher; he drives Pythagoras away by pelting him with sheeps' hearts and guts. His fat wife, Procne, is stuffing sausages when she recognizes her raped sister Philomela. And so on.

In his stunning re-creation of this tale of Philomel—"so rudely forced./ Tereu."—Ransmayr gives new and lurid life to the figures of what is perhaps Ovid's most influential story. Tereus still rapes his wife's sister and cuts out her tongue, Procne still discovers the truth and avenges her sister by killing his son Itys, and Tereus tracks the two sisters down through the ruins of Tomi, only to see them change into birds, swallow and nightingale, and to turn bird himself as he pursues them through the air. But Ransmayr's version is grimly realistic. The raped and tongueless woman who stumbles down from the mountains is mocked and tormented by the town children until Procne "recognized the disfigured, fly-covered face. It was her sister Philomela." Ransmayr does not, however, try to sidestep the tale's fantastic ending:

> Tereus lifted his ax. . . . But the two women did not raise their arms to fend off the blows—instead, two startled birds spread their wings. . . . Yet even before they shot through the broken window into the open air and were lost in the blue night sky, the curved handle of the ax had become yet another beak. Tereus's arms had turned to wings, his hair to brown and black feathers. A hoopoe lifted in easy, billowing flight and sailed off in pursuit of the two escaping birds . . .

This smooth blend of gritty detail and high fantasy, the essence of the novel's method, resembles the magic realism of García Márquez and may indeed have been influenced by the Colombian writer's work, especially *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The novel's translator has added an "Ovidian Repertory," which, in parallel columns, poses the lives, loves, and transformations of the mythical characters against those of Ransmayr's world. Since this repertory was compiled on the principle of an index, only those figures named in Ransmayr's text are included. As a result, readers unfamiliar with Ovid or Greek mythology will search in vain for an explanation of the appearance of a white cow (Io), a herdsman with eyes all over his body (Argus), and a silent killer (Mercury), who slips into the room, slits the herdsman's throat, and leads the white cow away.

Ransmayr has transformed not only the mythical persons of the *Metamorphoses*, but also the world in which Ovid lived and died. In this world Ovid's exile is the result not of a *carmen* or an *error*, but of the workings of a repressive bureaucracy, the members of "the society of

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power, families whose pomp and luxury, safeguarded by dogs, glass-studded walls, armed sentries, and barbed-wire barricades, reflected the splendor of the emperor." Invited to be one of eleven speakers at the dedication of a gigantic new stadium, before an audience of 200,000 people and the emperor Augustus, Ovid forgot to preface his speech with the mandatory fulsome compliments to the emperor.

As if that were not scandalous enough, his speech described, in hideous detail, the death from plague of the entire population of the island of Aegina and their replacement by ants that appropriated the organs of the dead to assume human form. This new race, said Ovid, was

> docile and asked no questions and followed their new leaders, who were of the same descent, into the triumphs and miseries of time—without complaint . . . an army of workers wherever ditches were to be dug, walls razed, or bridges built. In time of war they were a nation of warriors. . . . And yet, through all these transformations, they proved more tractable than any other race . . .

Ovid went on to prophesy that the new stadium would also be "a place of transformation and rebirth, a stone caldron in which from hundreds of thousands of the abandoned, the subjugated, and the helpless a new nation will be cooked . . ."

The story of the plague is based on a long narrative in the *Metamorphoses*, but the import and the emphasis of the original have been transformed. The ants in Ovid become the famous Myrmidons, the warrior hordes of Achilles (the Greek word *myrmex* means "ant"). In Ransmayr's parable they become the docile, tractable working class of the bureaucratic state and in the vision of the future the dispossessed and abandoned who will finally come into their own.

Quite apart from the omission of the compliments to the emperor and the ill-omened content of the speech, Ovid's final words would have been enough to provoke the emperor's wrath. But Augustus had not heard a word the poet said. He was asleep. At the imperial court, however, there was set in motion the next morning "an apparatus of whispers, dossier entries, hints, and recommendations." Its movements "were slow, dispassionate, and void of . . . anger," but it "was not to be placated, nor could it be shut down. And so information concerning the poet Publius Ovidius Naso, verified now in files, gradually began to flow," ending in an indictment of the *Metamorphoses*, "the work of an enemy of the state, an affront to Rome, the document of a deranged mind."

There followed a visit of a functionary to the emperor, who, fascinated by the spectacle of a rhinoceros that had been sent him by the procurator of Sumatra, waved the visitor away with "an abrupt, curt motion of his hand, hardly more vigorous than if he were shaking off a housefly." The gesture was variously interpreted as it moved along the bureaus of the apparatus: prison, labor camp, Sicily, and the stonecutters; an injunction against literary activity for a year; a forfeiture of royalties; merely a warning. When the emperor's sign finally "reached the bottom level—where the blows are actually inflicted and not simply decreed, where the cell doors really clicked shut," a judge gave a decision. "A wave of His hand meant *Begone. Out of my sight.* Out of the sight of the emperor, however, meant to the end of the world. And the end of the world was Tomi."

We are in Kafka country here. Or perhaps in Ceausescu's Romania, where, in fact, before the fall of the regime, a German-language periodical in Bucharest was denied permission to publish an extract from Ransmayr's novel. The sections of the novel that are set in Rome, under Augustus and his successor Tiberius, are a chilling vision of what happens when the "empire falls into the hands of a single person" and the world becomes "a safe and dreary prison for his enemies."

But Ransmayr's Rome and Tomi are also the "last world." In Tomi, metamorphosis is a phenomenon not experienced by human beings alone. The basic matter of the earth is being transformed. The iron town is turning to rust. "Iron shutters . . . crumbled like cardboard and disintegrated. Wrought-iron fences buckled. The decoration of metal lilies, spear-headed leaves, even the railings on the footbridges across the brook broke loose. Gratings rotted like plaited grass." The landscape too begins to disintegrate. "The landslides had not spared a single upland valley. Like primeval monsters clad in uprooted pines and heather, flows of gravel and mud had come down . . . creeping over meadows, deserted huts, and the entrances to abandoned mine shafts."

In Ovid's great poem similar changes are described by Pythagoras in Book XV:

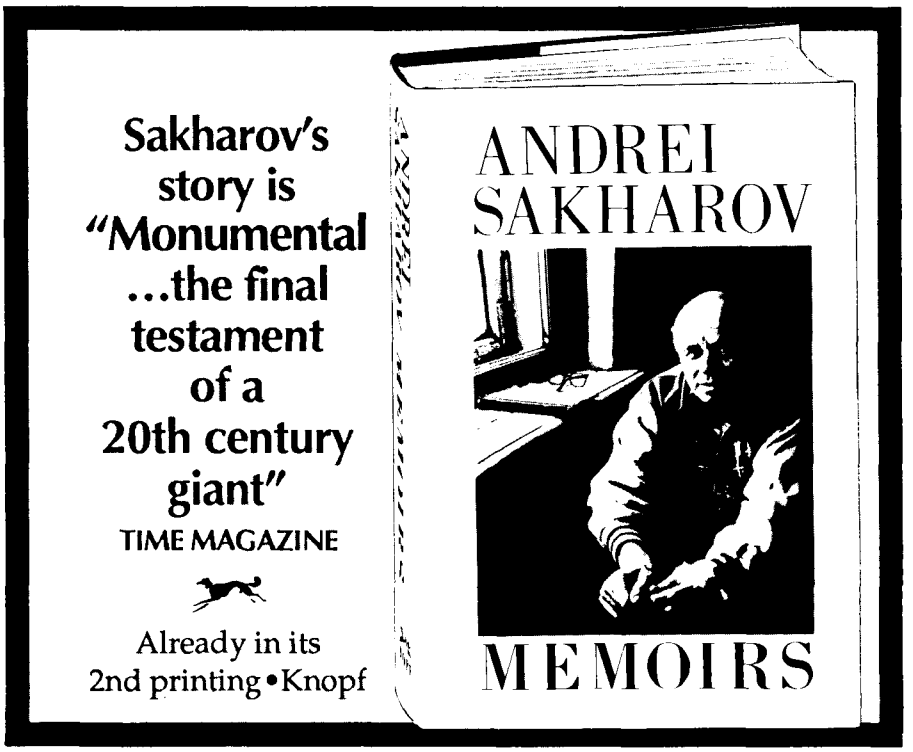
> Nothing, no nothing, keeps its outward show
> For golden ages turn to years of iron . . .
> I've seen land turn to miles of flood-tossed waters,
> Or land rise up within a restless sea . . .

But in Pythagoras's famous speech the context of these changes is optimistic:

> Nothing retains the shape of what it was,
> And Nature, always making old things new,
> Proves nothing dies within the universe
> But takes another being in new forms.

The process is one of continuous renewal and rebirth. In Ransmayr's book, however, the emphasis is on loss, on ruin, on decay. The world is running down, and it is the last world, *die letzte Welt*. We are not likely to be given another.

BERNARD KNOX is director emeritus of the Center for Hellenic Studies. His most recent book is *Essays Ancient and Modern* (Johns Hopkins Press).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The English Novel Gets Laid

By Ian Buruma

The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi

(Viking, 288 pp., $18.95)

Hanif Kureishi, playwright, screenwriter, novelist, and naughty boy at large, is Britain's answer to Spike Lee. He is best known for his screenplays for *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is his first novel. Like Lee, he is an artistic and political dandy, attracted to scenes of anarchy, fiddling away as the movie sets burn. Just as Lee amuses himself with fantasies of rumbling in Bed-Stuy, Kureishi projects images of riots in Brixton on the walls of his feverish mind. His game is to shock the bourgeoisie, posing as a badass; in fact, he is a rather nice young man from the right side of the tracks. And, oh yes, he likes to sport a baseball cap indoors.

Given all this, it is not surprising that Kureishi is a fashionable figure in his city—the toast of West London, you might say. The badass image is, of course, the perfect entrée into the smarter dining rooms. For Kureishi's combination of talent, charm, exotic ancestry, and subversive posturing is just what people who are chic, liberal, and a trifle bored like. As Oscar Wilde observed when he stormed the citadels of English privilege, there are two ways to seduce the aristocracy: to shock and to amuse. The great dandies manage both.

Still, just as there is a devoted housewife struggling to emerge from the bosom of many a prostitute, so does the dandy's mask often hide the most ordinary countenance. One thing that struck me about Kureishi's novel is how conventional it is behind its radical pose, how conventionally English. Aldous Huxley described, in *Chrome Yellow*, a scene in which a callow young man, sitting on the terrace of an English country house, confesses to a vinegary older man that he has just written a novel:

> "My poor Denis!" exclaimed Mr. Scogan. "What about?"
>
> Denis felt rather uncomfortable. "Oh, about the usual things, you know."
>
> "Of course," Mr. Scogan groaned. "I'll describe the plot for you. Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the universe on his shoulders. He writes a novel of dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in Amour and disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous Future."
>
> Denis blushed scarlet . . .

That is the gist of Kureishi's novel, too. Naturally, times have changed. Dabbling in Amour in the Home Counties in 1921 would not have included (in a literary novel, at least) giving blow jobs to aspiring musicians or being buggered by fashionable playwrights. And since the writing of novels is not quite the glamorous occupation it once was, Kureishi's hero—called Kareem, not Percy, in another sign of changing times—becomes a successful actor instead. And rather than the philistine, barbarous, boring public school, we have the philistine, barbarous, boring suburbs. But the theme is essentially the same as the one that has exercised the minds of English novelists, and indeed the English people, for what seems like forever: the long and arduous climb up the slippery slope of society. In short, getting on. (Kareem even does what English boys are all alleged to do in the better schools of the land: he falls in love with his best friend and jacks him off in his bedroom, under the no doubt approving eyes of the rock stars on the wall.)

The most valued arrow in the quiver of the successful British social climber is charm. Kareem, who is of Kureishi's own age and background—Pakistani, suburban, lower-middle-class—has, as they used to say in Huxley's time, bags of charm: "Dad taught me to flirt with everyone I met, girls and boys alike, and I came to see charm, rather than courtesy or honesty, or even decency, as the primary social grace. And I even came to like people who were callous or vicious provided they were interesting." The "interesting people," with interesting radical opinions, are the ones who get the blow jobs. Not the least of Kureishi's charms is his propensity to satirize his own predilections.

There is a mythical quality to Kureishi's South London suburbs; they are both a hell to escape from into the exciting anarchy of the city, and a source of eternal comfort and inspiration, indeed much like the mythical school that horrified and inspired previous generations of British writers. The shadow of Bromley hangs over Kureishi's work in the way that Eton hung over the work of Cyril Connolly. School and suburb seem to be gilded prisons from which there is no ultimate escape, not on the Riviera, or in the deserts of Arabia, or in Manhattan, or even in Notting Hill Gate. The English writer, it seems, is more frequently a hostage to his adolescence than his counterparts abroad. (I say his, for fewer women appear to share this predicament.) The English literary dandy is so often an eternal schoolboy, playing over and over again the fantasies bred in the oppressive hothouse of the school dormitory or the suburban parlor.

Kureishi is rather good, not surprisingly, on suburban parlors. His view of his native suburb is unlike the affectionate satire of, say, John Walters on Baltimore; it is, instead, an odd mixture of hatred and sentimentality, snobbery and high comedy. Anybody who has ever spent a Sunday afternoon in the sepulchral greenery of Bromley, Beckenham, or Penge can understand the hatred. But the snobbish division of everybody into interesting people (gays, punks radicals, non-whites) or ghastly suburbanites makes for some cardboard characters, who behave much as one would expect them to do in a comic book for freaks in the 1960s. The "straights" are relentlessly straight, and, of course, racist—that is, until they are turned on by one of the freaks, through drugs, or, as is more often the case in Kureishi's tales, sex.

In a diary kept by Kureishi during the filming of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and published together with the script (another conceit that he shares with Spike Lee), Kureishi announces his personal philosophy: "I saw the '60s on TV and was formed by what I missed out on." And so he continues to think "in that now old way, in terms of the 'straight' world and the rest. . . . I still think of businessmen as semi-criminals; I'm suspicious of anyone in a suit." And so on and so forth. As I say, adolescence is hard to shake for the gilded youth of England.

Still, Kureishi has created some memorable characters who do not conform to stereotypes—quite the contrary, in fact. He is particularly good on Indians and Pakistanis, like the young Asian-English boy in *My Beautiful Laundrette* who falls in

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love with the white punk. His homosexuality was not what made him interesting; but the fact that he was Asian, straight-looking, and gay was a departure from the norm. If he had been white and camp, the effect would not have been nearly so fresh. As far as this novel is concerned, the funniest character is Dad, the Buddha of Suburbia himself, who leads the natives by the nose in hilarious meditation sessions. There is some great comedy in this, but it is somewhat undercut by the impression that Kureishi himself takes Dad's Zen sessions a little too seriously. When Dad tells Kareem that "I want to help others contemplate the deeper wisdom of themselves which is often concealed in the rush of everyday life," Kareem answers: "It's the best thing I've heard you say." Kareem, too, must have watched the '60s on TV.

Kureishi has some good sport with Kareem, when he drifts into a theater troupe in the city as the first step up the social ladder. Kareem, the nice boy from Beckenham, "an Englishman born and bred, almost," is asked to perform as Kipling's Mowgli, and is instructed to learn how to speak with a stage Indian accent. He is humiliated, of course, but it is the price that he must pay for the company of interesting people. Despite these comic interludes, however, the inner-city half of the book is less good than the suburban part. There is too much worrying about career, too much melancholy thought and universe-carrying. This includes much agonizing about the ultimate emptiness of success and the shallowness of human relationships. And these agonies are set (where else?) in New York, that soulless, wicked capital of capitalist anomie. And so, in the end, Kareem returns to (where else?) home sweet home.

What makes Kureishi's novel and screenplays different from the average fare is the race factor. It is new to see young Indian-Englishmen snog with punks behind the washing machine. And it is to Kureishi's credit that he treats "race relations" with a large dollop of humor. But there is an irritating tendency, not uncommon among middle-class fantasists, to romanticize what French intellectuals call, with evident relish, *les marginaux*: blacks, gays, freaks, militants. It is part of Kureishi's inner-city vision to lump these together. As in Auden's famous remark about New Yorkers, Kureishi's characters are not British, they are Londoners: white Londoners, blacks, gays, straights, Pakis, punks, dykes, all screwing in one big heap. All you need is love. I can dig that.

But there is another point as well. "One plus of the repressive '80s has been cultural interest in marginalized and excluded groups," writes Kureishi in his diary. Well, yes; but the best writing on "marginals" is done by people who don't regard them as such, by people who, temporarily or permanently, live among them, who are part of them. And despite his subcontinental ancestry, Kureishi is hardly marginal. You feel that he looks at the marginals much as Jack Kerouac did, or Norman Mailer, or Mick Jagger. They are types to admire, to imitate, to be titillated by, before retreating into another dining room, to regale one's friends with tales of the mean streets. One is also reminded of Auden and Isherwood's camp proletarianism, with their hanging out with rough trade and smoking Woodbines. Isherwood remarked that if homosexuality had not existed, he would have invented it. Anything to lash out and shock the booboisie of England.

Kureishi's world is not unlike that of Jagger and the Stones. They, too, are products of the London suburbs, having their inner-city dreams, mimicking black blues, strutting as though they were raised in the heat of the ghetto, faking badass cockney accents. They, too, are imaginary street fighting men. But at least Jagger doesn't take himself seriously. His politics are rock 'n' roll fantasy. What is mildly amusing in a three-minute rock song becomes very tiresome, however, in a feature-length film or novel. It is silly to compare, as Kureishi does in his script for *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, a London housing estate to Soweto, or to liken a bunch of kids leaving a squatter area to "the PLO leaving Beirut." It is irresponsible to say in a radio program that the anti-poll tax riots in London were "terrific."

The constant hyperbole about "oppression" under the Thatcher government blunts the real criticism to be aimed at her policies. The result is a kind of "Weimarization" of politics: the fantasy of oppression becomes so pervasive that any amount of extremism against the status quo is welcomed, almost for aesthetic reasons. As with the satirists of Weimar, and indeed many of the interesting people in London, social snobbery often lies at the root of Kureishi's politics. This phenomenon is especially marked in a society that does not value its intellectuals: snobbery is their last recourse. When Harold Pinter, the dean of interesting people, disembarks from his Mercedes Benz to sneer at the greedy new rich of Thatcherism, you know where he stands: businessmen are semi-criminals, they are boring men in suits who are not entitled to have what Pinter has, they should know their place.

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When the squatters in *Sammy and Rosie* must move on, it is because "the government's encouraging fat white men with bad haircuts to put money into the area." Note the fat, note the white, note (above all) the bad haircuts. These are definitely not interesting people.

The thing about Britain is that the interesting people are not taken very seriously here. They never have been. British philistinism sees to that. And yet it is not always easy to decide which is more annoying: the indifference of the suburbanites or the frivolousness of those who rebel against them.

IAN BURUMA, the foreign editor of *The Spectator* in London, is the author most recently of *God's Dust* (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux).

The Cannibal Revolution

BY ISTVÁN DEÁK

Report on the Murder of the General Secretary by Karel Kaplan translated by Karel Kovanda

(Ohio State University Press, 342 pp., $39.50)

On November 26, 1952, Josef Urválek, the Czechoslovak state prosecutor, delivered his closing remarks at the trial of the "Leadership of the Antistate Conspiratorial Center Headed by Rudolf Slánský" in Prague. At the end of his four-hour speech, Urválek concluded:

> Citizen judges, in the name of the nation, whose freedom and happiness the conspirators opposed, in the name of peace, against which they infamously conspired, I demand the death penalty for all defendants. Let your verdict come down as an iron fist, without the slightest mercy. Let it be fire which will extirpate the roots of the infamous canker of treason. Let it be a bell which will ring all over our beautiful motherland, calling for new victories in our march toward the sun of socialism.

In their own closing remarks, the fourteen defendants, all former high-ranking members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, unanimously insisted on their guilt, and literally begged the court for the strictest possible penalty. A day later former General Secretary Slánský and ten others were condemned to be hanged. None appealed the sentence, and they were led, early in the morning on December 3, to the gallows. There they died, one by one, hailing the Czechoslovak people, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Union. Their bodies were cremated; their ashes were placed in paper bags and scattered on the outskirts of Prague.

The trial and the executions were accompanied by organized demonstrations, but also by spontaneous outbursts of popular anger. There were many who protested the fact that three of the defendants had received only life sentences. Workers who felt that their economic misery was due to these traitors and wreckers accused the judges of doing the enemy's work. Thus ended the greatest show trial in Czechoslovak history; but a wave of arrests and trials continued for two more years. They resulted in the death of perhaps a hundred Communists, and the incarceration of thousands more in prisons and concentration camps.

The Czechoslovak trials were not unique, of course; they were part of a vast wave of Communist purges throughout Eastern Europe. What made the Prague trials remarkable, however, was that they took place in a country whose pre-war bourgeois government had not executed a single Communist; that the persecution continued long after the survivors of Stalinist terror had begun to be released from prison in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe; and that eight out of the eleven who were hanged on December 3, 1952, and eleven out of the fourteen who had been sentenced, and a great many of the other purge victims in Czechoslovakia, were Jews.

Karel Kaplan, the author of this *Report*, was himself a Communist. In 1963 he headed a Party commission charged with examining the trial documents. The commission had access to all the collections of the Party Central Committee, and in the end it produced a report that totaled some 1,200 typewritten pages. In the wake of its report, all the Communist trial victims were exonerated. Kaplan, however, continued his research; and his persistence resulted in the loss of his job, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

In the late 1970s Kaplan immigrated to West Germany, secretly taking a large number of documents with him. Since then he has published several works—in German and French—on the Czechoslovak show trials. This is his first publication in English. Like his earlier works, it can be considered absolutely reliable. Kaplan's documentation has been amply corroborated by the memoirs of such trial survivors as Evžen Löbl and Artur London, and by such historical accounts as the one by George H. Hodos, himself a survivor of the Hungarian purge trials. Kaplan's is the most thorough study of the Slánský affair, and for that reason, perhaps, it makes for somewhat difficult reading. He analyzes the international and domestic causes of the Czechoslovak purge trials and the reasons why, in his opinion, the defendants confessed. Thanks to him, we have become quite familiar with these events. Still, for me the whole nightmarish process remains as incomprehensible as before.

Kaplan and other scholars have demonstrated that the Eastern European show trials grew out of an international meeting of Communist leaders held in September 1947, at Śklarska Poręba in Poland. There, on Stalin's orders, the Information Bureau of Communist Parties (Cominform) was founded, the Eastern European Communists were told to speed up the Bolshevization of their countries, and the Western European comrades were exhorted to sharpen the class struggle. The process was accelerated immeasurably a year later, when Stalin turned on the independent-minded Yugoslav Communists led by Tito. Thereafter, in their feverish haste to prepare for what Stalin considered an inevitable world war, as well as in their effort to demonstrate their loyalty and to rid themselves of potential rivals in the Party, the Eastern European Communist leaders engaged widely in persecution. For his part, the renegade Tito also mounted massive purges, except that his victims were called "Stalinist agents" rather than "running dogs of Tito."

From the Czechoslovak point of view, the most significant foreign trial was that of the Hungarian Communist leader László Rajk and his "Titoist" and "Trotskyite" accomplices, held in Budapest in 1949. Subjected to unbelievable brutality, the accused named hundreds of fellow "conspirators," among them many Czechoslovak Communists. Partly in an attempt to justify his action, Hungary's Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi sub-

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sequently pressed the Czechoslovaks to stage their own purge trials. But Klement Gottwald, the president of Czechoslovakia, and Slánský dragged their feet. Finally it became clear to them that Stalin himself wanted action, and there began a desperate hunt for a Czechoslovak Rajk.

Hundreds of leading Czechoslovak Communists—Slovak ones in particular—were arrested and tortured until they, too, began to confess to imaginary crimes. Still, to the exasperation of a growing number of Soviet advisers, the Czechoslovak political police proved singularly slow and inept in constructing a "Great Conspiracy." "Stalin sent me here to prepare a trial, and I have no time to waste," Soviet Police General Likhachev once exclaimed to a Czechoslovak flunky:

> I didn't come here for discussions. I came to Czechoslovakia to see heads roll. I'd rather wring a hundred and fifty other necks than lose my own. I don't care where you get [the information] and I don't care how true it is. I'll believe it, and you leave the rest to me. What do you care about some Jewish shit anyway?

Likhachev was indeed fated to lose his neck in the Soviet Union a little later, but for the time being his exhortations were successful. Slánský personally selected some important victims, among them the Slovak Communist leaders Vladimír Clementis and Gustáv Husák, who were accused of "Slovak bourgeois nationalism." Former Foreign Minister Clementis was to become a co-defendant with his persecutor Slánský, and was hanged with him, but Husák lived to tell the tale. Husák (who in 1969 became general secretary of the Communist Party, and then president of Czechoslovakia until his overthrow in the 1989 revolution) engaged in extreme self-criticism while still at liberty and in possession of his high Party functions. This made his arrest inevitable. Once in prison, however, he proved remarkably tough. Beaten repeatedly, deprived of sleep, and forced on at least one occasion to remain standing for seventy hours, he resisted confessing to some of the wildest accusations. (Another method favored by the interrogators was to force their victims to wear gloves for weeks, until their fingertips rotted.)

Only very slowly did Husák come around to confessing such crimes as having plotted with his companions to assassinate Slánský. By the winter of 1950-51, in other words, it looked as if things were moving smoothly toward the Great Czechoslovak Conspiracy trial, tentatively titled "The Espionage and Sabotage Activity of V. Clementis and the Factional Anti-Party Group of Bourgeois Nationalists in the Communist Party of Slovakia." But then it turned out that this was no longer enough to satisfy Stalin. It appears that the Soviet leader had begun to lose interest in the Yugoslav struggle, which was proving impossible to win. It was also becoming clear that Stalin's earlier pro-Israeli policy—the Soviet Union backed the creation of a Jewish state in 1947, while Britain escalated its persecution of Zionist activities precisely because it feared possible Soviet influence—had failed: the Israelis were moving closer to the West, the Israeli Communists were powerless, and the Arab governments were furious. Stalin, therefore, reversed his Mideast policy. In domestic terms, that meant mounting an anti-Zionist campaign.

In the Soviet Union, this led to the ferocious persecution of Jewish Communists, which ceased only with the death of Stalin in March 1953. In Czechoslovakia, it brought about a complete change in the nature of the Great Conspiracy. Slánský's name had come up many times during the interrogations; this was inevitable, in view of the police's attempt to persuade Clementis and Company that they had been plotting to murder the general secretary. Now, however, prompted by newly arrived Soviet advisers, the Czechoslovak interrogators ordered their prisoners to name Slánský—the Jew Slánský—no longer as a target of their conspiracy, but as their leader.

Some of Slánský's victims were, no doubt, only too happy to comply with the request. Descended from a middle-class family, Slánský had been one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and had spent several years in Moscow before being sent to German-occupied Slovakia in 1944 to lead the Communist partisans there. After the war, he became Gottwald's closest collaborator and the second-most-important person in the Party and the country. On July 31, 1951, Czechoslovakia celebrated Slánský's birthday; he was awarded the Order of Socialism, and several factories were named in his honor. By that time, however, the police had a considerable dossier on him, and a terrified Gottwald decided to sacrifice the general secretary. According to other sources, Gottwald himself had plotted the overthrow of the hard-line general secretary, so as to appear to Stalin as the foremost representative in Czechoslovakia of the new Soviet-ordained intransigent Party line.

On November 23 Slánský was suddenly arrested. Handcuffed, blindfolded, and gagged, he was transported to Ruzyně prison on the outskirts of Prague. This was a momentous event in the history of communism, not only because Slánský was the highest-ranking Communist leader in Eastern Europe ever to be imprisoned, but also because the chief accusation against him was not Titoism, not even Trotskyism, but cosmopolitanism, Freemasonry, and Zionism. Slánský, in short, became the primary target of the new anti-Semitic campaign. Scores of Eastern European Jewish Communists had fallen victim to earlier purges, to be sure, and even at the Rajk trial the charge of Zionism had been used in passing; but never before had simply being a Jew been construed as a crime in the way it was now.

Slánský's arrest was followed, moreover, by the arrest of many other Jewish Communists. Preparations for the great trial took an entire year. Slánský, who had read scores of extorted confessions before, was foolish enough to believe at first that he had been arrested by mistake. He readily confessed to grave mistakes, but even under torture he refused for a long time to call himself a traitor and enemy. He even tried to commit suicide. (The police chose to interpret the attempt as a base provocation.) But in the end, Slánský, too, confessed: to having plotted to restore the capitalist system; to having been a paid agent of the CIA; to having taken his orders from, among others, the British left-wing Labour deputy and now archdevil Konni Zilliacus. Between 1946 and 1948 Slánský met repeatedly with Zilliacus and other Labour Party members, all of whom sympathized with the Eastern European Communist experiment; this was now construed as extensive intelligence activity with Zilliacus, and Zilliacus was labeled "an agent of the British Intelligence Service." Finally, Slánský was accused of having plotted the assassination of his friend Gottwald.

Once they indicated that they were prepared to make a full confession, Slánský and his co-defendants were treated much more leniently, and they spent the following several weeks editing the trial script and committing it to memory. So, incidentally, did the assigned prosecutors and judges. In a rather novel precautionary measure, words spoken at the dress rehearsal were recorded on tape: in case a defendant suddenly became recalcitrant, his voice could be replaced by the voice on the machine. The prisoners were so well coached that, during the trial, when the judge or the prosecutor inadvertently skipped a question, they answered it nonetheless. All in all, the performance proved a resounding success.

Kaplan offers three motives to explain the cooperative behavior of the defen-

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dants: the fear of further brutality, the hope of saving their own lives and of sparing their families, the loyalty to communism and to the Party. He also reproduces the farewell letters the condemned wrote to family and friends, none of which was subsequently forwarded. The letters are heartbreaking, but they make clear that Party loyalty was foremost in the minds of these men. This is also confirmed by the last words that they pronounced on the gallows. "Long live the Soviet Union, long live the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia!" exclaimed Karel. Šváb and Slánský declared, "I've got what I deserved." It is important to understand that, especially for the Jews among them, the Party had been their greatest hope, their only true home in a hostile world. Slánský's parents and his two brothers, for instance, had been killed by the fascists, and he himself owed his survival to having been summoned to Moscow in 1939.

Perhaps he was now prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of his saviors. Or perhaps the rabid anti-Semitism that characterized the interrogation and the trial caused him and his fellow-Jewish defendants to despair of the future. The cruel fate that they escaped under fascism seemed to have finally caught up with them. They could accept such charges as Trotskyism; it was an accusation that they themselves had often hurled at their rivals. Their self-respect collapsed, however, when denounced as "Jewish Titoists," "Jewish swine," and "Jewish murderers." After all, they themselves had never admitted in public, often not even to their own families, that they were Jews. Slánský's self-confidence might have been further weakened by the fact that he was bunched together at the same trial with those he had persecuted. (We know a lot about Slánský's private musings from the reports of a political police officer who had been planted in his cell, whose accounts Kaplan reproduces extensively.)

Interestingly, not all the purge victims were prepared to make a "full" confession. A few resisted almost to the point of death under torture; and, because the Party insisted on total submission, none of the handful of resisters was executed. Husák, for example, retracted his confession at his trial in April 1954, and, as a consequence, he got away with a mere life sentence.

There has been no trial in recent history to approach the insane perfection of the Communist purges. Even the resistance trials in Nazi Germany strike one as pretty old-fashioned affairs: there the defendants were indeed true enemies of the regime, and they were allowed to try to minimize their guilt—which, needless to say, did not prevent their execution. No defendant in Nazi Germany was forced to confess to crimes that he had manifestly not committed. Perhaps only the Great Inquisition bears some resemblance to the Communist show trials, for the Inquisition's victims were often tortured until they confessed to heresies that they had never committed, and were persuaded to collaborate with their persecutors in order to save their souls and to serve the greater glory of Holy Mother Church.

Above all, the purge trials reinforced the nationalism and isolationism of the Soviet bloc regimes. Their principal victims were the "Swiss," "Londoners," or "Spaniards," that is, local Communists who had fought in the Spanish Civil War or served the Party in some Western European post. Slánský and several of his companions, however, were the only "Muscovites" ever to be sentenced in an Eastern European show trial; others who had been in the Soviet Union escaped such trials (except for those who had been summarily executed earlier on Stalin's orders while still in Moscow). But then Slánský was considered a "Westerner," too, because he was a Jew. Separated not only from the West, but also from one another, by impenetrable frontiers, the Eastern European people's democracies in the early 1950s engaged in the most extreme form of economic and cultural isolationism. Though they were meekly submissive toward the Soviet Union, these champions of proletarian internationalism brought nationalism and xenophobia to a triumphant conclusion.

The show trials were utterly self-defeating. The victims were all loyal Communists; none had deviated from the party line, none was an oppositionist, none a "national Communist." The Party killed some of its best sons—and what it received in exchange was a crisis of confidence in the Party ranks. Some began to doubt the infallibility of a party that had allowed hundreds of long-term Gestapo, CIA, Secret Service, and Israeli agents to rise to command positions. Later, when the survivors emerged from prison and told their tales, an entire generation of young Communist intellectuals began to question the validity of a system that had wrought such havoc among the Party faithful. The immediate outcome was the Polish and Hungarian revolutions of 1956. The ultimate result was the fall of communism. Perhaps Clementis, Rajk, and all the other Communists did not die in vain.

ISTVÁN DEÁK teaches history at Columbia University and is the author most recently of *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (Oxford University Press).

Writing the Land

BY VERLYN KLINKENBORG

Collected Stories by Wallace Stegner

(Random House, 544 pp., $21.95)

At last count, Wallace Stegner had written thirteen novels, two short story collections (their contents are included in the present omnibus), seven books of nonfiction, two collections of essays, unnumbered scattered pieces, and he had edited the letters of Bernard De Voto. His first novel, *Remembering Laughter*, was published in 1937, when he was twenty-eight, his most recent, *Crossing to Safety*, fifty years later. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Angle of Repose* in 1972 and the National Book Award for *The Spectator Bird* in 1976. Like Rusty Cullen, the young English cowboy in his short story "Genesis," Stegner might well be "appalled at the effectiveness of his own will."

And yet I think that one New York editor was right when she said that Stegner is now more famous for the fellowship given in his name by Stanford University than he is for his books. Particularly among young writers—the very persons eligible for the Stegner Fellowship—his work is not well known. There is a premium on youth in publishing these days, and young writers tend to read the young. The same editor once told me about an author of hers, barely out of college, who wanted an advance of $250,000 for a second book. When she asked him why he needed so much mon-

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ey (silly question), he said, with the logic of a fastball pitcher, "What if I can't write someday?" When young writers flourish, longevity looks like a stunt. Distrust of time is the complaint lodged against brisk, efficient youth by the narrator of Stegner's *Angle of Repose*, whose bone disease has turned him to stone. "I believe in Time," he writes, "and in the life chronological rather than in the life existential. We live in time and through it, we build our huts in its ruins, or used to, and we cannot afford all these abandonings."

The life chronological usually brings its own abandonings, of course. The hardest thing for a writer to do after doing the hard thing—making a good book—is to do it again and again, not just with no lessening of vitality, but with the gradual accession of all the qualities that age in the humanist model of a life well spent is supposed to bring. Wallace Stegner has done that. His novels and stories are all of a family, but an extended, multigenerational family now, with members in Vermont, California, Montana, Utah, Saskatchewan, Wisconsin, and New York. Bring the lineal and collateral branches together and you can see the family resemblance, a metaphor rewritten by time in face after face. His distinction as a storyteller apart, Stegner has become one of the best writers of American prose in his era.

It sounds terribly old-fashioned (and rather bald) these days to say that the novel serves to represent the world, not just to figure the writer or the indeterminacies of language. But Stegner grew up old-fashioned on the Saskatchewan/Montana border, a place "at the far end of an attenuated tradition," where if the world was represented by language at all it was likely to be the language of mail-order catalogs. Looking back over his long life of writing, one is struck by how little Stegner's work has been affected by modernism, postmodernism, and all the formal and stylistic elaborations that have come since. In Stegner's writing there is no more experimentation than seems natural to a novelist discovering his lineage and trying out his powers within the familiar, accepted boundaries of a conservative education.

From his beginnings as a writer to the present, his work has conveyed a strong sense that the received tools of narrative are still good for storytelling and for mirroring nature. This explains, in part, the consistency of his voice over such a long career, a feature that is particularly apparent in *Collected Stories*, all of which were first published before the appearance of Stegner's great late novels, *All the Little Live Things* (1969), *Angle of Repose*, *The Spectator Bird*, and *Crossing to Safety* (1987).

Though he has written often about the East, Stegner is always called a Western writer, as if that had as precise a meaning as calling Faulkner a Southern writer. Stegner is Western because of his uprootedness. "Since I was born in Iowa in 1909," he once wrote, "I have lived in twenty places in eight different states, besides a couple of places in Canada, and in some of these places we lived in anywhere from two to ten different houses and neighborhoods." You get to be a Southerner by clinging to the architecture like ivy and to the trees like Spanish moss. But until recently you got to be a Westerner by remaining at the scene of your most recent dislocation. Oddly, both result in what Stegner, describing his own gift, calls "a tyrannous sense of place."

It is a peculiarity and a strength of Stegner's vision that in looking east across America, he finds everywhere the same rootlessness he feels in himself. "I suppose," says Joseph Allston, the narrator of *The Spectator Bird*:

> that an Indian on an Ohio mound might have the sense that down under him his own ancestors went in layers, generation below generation, all of them as native as the corn. But all other sorts of Americans, even those whose families have been on this continent for many generations, seem to me deprived, hanging around the national parks that enclose other people's archaeology, or else, like me, tourists in a private graveyard hunting hopefully for their own names.

In Stegner's novels and stories, the New World is a country for moving across, not for sinking roots down into. As Abe Kaplan says in *Second Growth*, "Even when you are born here sometimes you're not a native."

The American West, in particular, is a region where anything you can say about the land is likely to be more important than anything you can say about its inhabitants. True Westerner, Stegner always begins with the land. When Sid Lang praises Larry Morgan's writing in *Crossing to Safety*, he singles out "the particularity and brightness of [his] images, [his] sense of place, [his] verbal felicity." These are all strengths of Stegner's, but his sense of place is his most distinctive attribute. No matter what he writes, he immediately anchors the reader in a palpable locale as fully rendered as the roundest of his characters. You come to count on him for it, even in a genre where you expect to find interiors, not landscapes. Stegner almost never yields to the miniaturist demands of the short story; his landscapes are "settings" the way a clear view of the night sky is weather. Occasionally, they dwarf the stories in which they are created.

One of the peculiar illusions of the Western landscape is that it always leads you to imagine a time before white men took it on. Its vastness embodies the proportions of geological time. In bad weather it displays to their fullest the cold, unmothering qualities of nature. It repels domesticity, even the drifting domesticity of cowboys. In "Genesis," Stegner's finest story, Rusty Cullen is caught out with the rest of a band of Saskatchewan cowhands while driving a herd of cattle through the famous 1906 blizzard. He stumbles half-dead down the riverbank to get water. "When he chopped through the river's inch of ice and watched the water well up and overflow the hole it seemed like some dark force from the ancient heart of the earth that could at any time rise around them silently and obliterate their little human noises and tracks and restore the plain to its emptiness again."

That emptiness lies at the heart of many of the stories collected in this volume. Here is the beginning of "Bugle-song," which later became part of *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*, published in 1943:

> There had been a wind during the night, and all the loneliness of the world had swept up out of the southwest. The boy had heard it wailing through the screens of the sleeping porch where he lay, and he had heard the washtub bang loose from the outside wall and roll down toward the

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coulee, and the slam of the screen doors, and his mother's padding feet after she rose to fasten things down. Through one half-open eye he had peered up from his pillow to see the moon skimming windily in a luminous sky; in his mind he had seen the prairie outside with its woolly grass and cactus white under the moon, and the wind, whining across that endless oceanic land, sang in the screens, and sang him back to sleep.

This gesture of Bruce Mason's mind—picturing the look of the prairie outside as he lay warm in his bed—is a sympathetic leap of imagination. It sounds like the birth of a narrator, that moment in which the storyteller, as a boy, first learns relief in perspective, learns to wear a benign countenance as he looks down from a lunar height on himself and on the human race, so alone and so pitifully attached to its utterly indifferent landscape. It resembles the moment with which "Genesis" begins. On a fine autumn dawn, a band of cowboys trails off across the prairie, looking "like a print of Life on the Western Plains." Riding among them, Rusty Cullen imagines the scene in his mind. "He was enclosed in it, moving with it, but in his excitement he saw it as it would look from outside and above, and it made him want to stand up in his stirrups and yell." Between Bruce Mason's soothing, almost Coleridgean vision of the prairie at night and Rusty Cullen's threatening glimpse of the "dark force" that could "restore the plain to its emptiness again," there is only a difference in the weather. If you want to see God on the windswept prairie, Stegner seems to suggest, you will have to imagine him for yourself. When the weather is good, he'll have a succoring eye.

Early in *Crossing to Safety* the narrator, Larry Morgan, recalls that in high school "a bunch of us spent a whole year reading Cicero—De Senectute, on old age; De Amicitia, on friendship. De Senectute, with all its resigned wisdom, I will probably never be capable of living up to or imitating." Wisdom one finds almost anywhere in these stories of Stegner's. Resignation is nearly always missing, for it implies the immuring of the known world, the end of the capacity to look kindly at oneself and at humanity from outside and above. Crotchety as his characters sometimes become—and some of them are distinguished cranks, for age, like youth, has its proper enthusiasms—Stegner's own instinct is always to look for the long view, to leap outward sympathetically like Bruce Mason or Rusty Cullen.

Stegner closes this remarkable gathering of stories with "City of the Living," the title story of his 1956 collection. "City of the Living" follows the meditations of an American father named Robert Chapman as he nurses his son through typhoid in Luxor, Egypt, where they occupy a hotel room overlooking the Nile. This is as far from the Saskatchewan prairie as one can venture, farther than the Denmark of *The Spectator Bird*, farther even than the Philippines in "Something Spurious from the Mindanao Deep." There is no plot, no drama. There is simply a Westerner's growing realization that in Egypt the landscape is all flesh, flesh besieged by its own inherent corruption. From his window, Chapman watches a family bathe in the polluted Nile. He watches a young Egyptian boy wash himself with cupped handfuls of water and turn to pray toward the east.

And then, in one startling movement akin to the movements of sympathetic imagining in "Buglesong" and "Genesis," Chapman discovers that Egypt abounds in death because it abounds in life. As Chapman watches, as the reader watches with him, Stegner turns an emblem of death into an emblem of life:

> The distant rim was light-struck now. The first of the morning buzzards came from somewhere and planed across the motionless palm tops. It teetered and banked close so that Chapman saw the curve of its head like the vulture-headed image on [his son's] bed table: the vulture head of Mut, the Lady of Thebes, the Mother of the World. They eyed each other with a kind of recognition as it passed. It had a look like patience, and its shadow, passing and returning over the garden, brushing the ragged boy and the palms and the balcony where Chapman stood, might have seemed a threat but might also have been a kind of patrolling, almost a reassurance.

In his novels and in these admirable stories, "gathered up," as he so calmly says, "near the end of a lifetime of writing," Stegner's prose is itself a reassurance, a voice of acceptance, not resignation. Such are the rewards of belief in the life chronological.

VERLYN KLINKENBORG teaches creative writing at Harvard University. His new book, *The Last Fine Time*, will be published by Knopf in January.

Losing to Despair

BY JUDITH DUNFORD

The Cloning of Joanna May by Fay Weldon

(Viking, 288 pp., $18.95)

Leader of the Band by Fay Weldon

(Viking, 208 pp., $18.95)

The twentieth century has made it easy for writers to see humans as nothing but poor creatures in a disordered universe. Fay Weldon has produced a line of witty, ironic books out of her prevailing sense of how unfairly the odds are stacked and how little can be done to redress the balance. Her characters dangle on strings held by some mad marioneteer, their lives pulled this way and that by cosmic spite, coincidence, the mandates of biology, the darker demands of society.

Weldon is like a hornet, buzzing angrily with topics, ready to be politically shrill about almost anything that comes up in the chaos of contemporary events. The more she writes, it seems, the more she wants to write. Her last two novels have come out in less than a year. In the most recent, *The Cloning of Joanna May*, Weldon takes up the ancient question of nature and nurture. Her villain is Carl May, who has risen, through his own talents, from a horrifying childhood—his parents kept him chained around the neck in a dog's kennel—to become head of the British nuclear power industry and a member of the Board of Directors of practically everything else. He is a nasty piece of goods, the coldest, most manipulative man of science, all the human juices squeezed out.

The one love in his life was his wife, Joanna, a beauty of good, middle-class family, who, like Desdemona, married him because of the pity and terror she

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felt at his story. He wants her exclusively for himself, so he rules out children and keeps her like an ice queen in the abundance allowed the wife of the CEO. When, at age thirty, the restless Joanna thinks she is pregnant (wrongly—she is merely hysterical), he insists that she have an abortion, and without telling her has the head of the abortion clinic clone one of her eggs four times. The results are donated for implantation to four applicant-mothers. For Carl, the self-made man making self-made women, it is a peculiar mixture of love and spitefulness to reproduce his wife at the height of her beauty, a height from which she can only descend—and not tell her about it.

When the novel opens it is thirty years later, the time of the Chernobyl disaster, when the air over England and all of Europe is malignant and no one knows what to do. We learn that a few years earlier Joanna May had grown restless and frustrated with her life as her husband's most treasured acquisition, and had taken a lover. When they are discovered *in flagrante*, Carl has the lover killed and throws Joanna out, this time imprisoning her in the sterile comforts of alimony in a house on an island in the Thames. In the meantime the clones have grown up in their various homes, unaware of one another and of Joanna, further illustrations of The Influence of Early Home Life on Behavior (not on Character, though: they all have more or less the same character, more or less the same looks) and Weldon's view of modern women's options.

One is child-ridden and worn; her husband beats her. The others are childless. One is a bored suburban housewife in a perfect house whose husband is always off on another business trip. One is a self-absorbed photographer's model, one a university graduate, a reader for HBO who refuses to give up her independence to live with her sometime boyfriend. None is happy or attached to any man worth the attachment. When their men are not brutal, they are whiny, selfish, petulant, or vague one-night stands.

To Weldon's credit, the women are not much better; Weldon's ideology is never quite so primitive. Joanna and her clones are cranky, weak-kneed, unfocused, boring co-conspirators in the narrowing of their choices. They all meet very late in the novel when, in what seems to be a burst of impatience to get to the end, Weldon puts them through a quick series of coincidences dubious even in one of her elaborate fantasies, and has them determine to make better sense of their lives. Still, she takes the time to kill off Carl with poetic justice. As a public relations gesture meant to reassure a public anxious over Chernobyl, Carl and his mistress (Weldon's version of the tart-with-a-heart) jump into a nuclear reactor cooling pond to demonstrate the harmlessness of atomic energy. He dies of radiation poisoning.

Leader of the Band, which Weldon published last year, is the story of Sandra Harris, Starlady Sandra of a popular science program on television, forty-two years old, a first-rate astronomer, next in line for Royal Astronomer, one of the lucky few to have discovered a new planet. Astronomer or no, Sandra has more than the usual sense of rattling around in an uncozy Creation. Like Carl May, she has a horrifying family history. Her mother, now in a madhouse, was the dusky issue of the coupling in a hedgerow of an Anglican bishop's daughter and a passing gypsy.

Because of her swarthy good looks, she had been selected at fifteen to be impregnated by a Sylvia Plath fantasy de luxe, a Mengele-type Nazi doctor who conducted genetic experiments with his own sperm. (People do get born in complicated ways in Weldon novels.) Mengele-daddy was shot (not hanged) after the Nuremberg trials and never saw his perfect, blond Master Race replica, Sandra. Mother eventually married, gave birth to a son more entirely in her own image, madness included, who reached manhood just in time to throw himself under a train. Sandra is worried that she, too, may be off the rails.

Her reaction is to retreat into an outer tightness and control, a pure selfishness. Determined not to pass along any of her complicated genes, to stay childless, she is lured into a yuppie marriage with a chubby little achiever, divorced, who installs her in the well-equipped house of her predecessor. Good housekeeping is Weldon's nightmare. Here, too, the poor thing is kept as a prisoner of her husband's ambitions, serving as his cook and hostess; she, too, escapes into adultery. One day, at a party at the Greenwich Observatory, she and a member of the band lock eyes. Suddenly we are in the middle of a Gothic romance. Sandra all but swoons into his arms, he peels back her white satin dress (in the foliage, like her grandmother), and she leaves bed and board, tiled bathroom, chic wardrobe, and all her medical records to move into his camper. Gypsy blood will out!

Weldon can make good use of exorbitant plots like these when she can make them work as metaphors for the acciden-

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tal nature of existence, for the liberty it gives individuals to be successful by being unscrupulous. She writes about the claims of nature, which are always outrageous (often thanks to the meddlings of man), and the constraints of nurture (which are always nightmarish, certainly for women). But the fantastic twist of her fantastic plots is a triumph over imprisonment, a celebration of free will that exposes the inequities of social life. Despite Weldon's weakness for rhetoric, the spirit behind the exposé is less fiery radicalism than fairy-tale optimism, all-lived-happily-ever-after.

They are flimflam, of course, but pulled together with wit and verve. What makes her distinctive is her mad vitality, the always interesting way she tends to rush about in her own mind. When Weldon flies high, she is entertaining, even enlightening about the pretenses, absurdities, cruelties of life, gender, and society. As a storyteller she uses her satiric, mocking plots not only to tell us that the world is a tangled place but to draw us in—often in the same manner, the same voice—as any tale of once upon a time. In Weldon's novels, things *happen*, there are beginnings and endings. They may not satisfy the characters, but they can satisfy us.

The world, Weldon is always saying, just pulls the rug out from under you. Still, the good at heart may make their way to a steady corner, given time. A basic Weldon theme is that children, new lives, the old-fashioned nuclear family, for all its snares and pitfalls, for all its conversations spoken with forked tongue, may still be the best—the only—shot we have. Weldon has described herself as a feminist who washes her sons' socks, and she is careful to note her wifehood and motherhood on her books' jackets.

Weldon's mind is a furious one, but always for the obvious cause. She is against meanness, exploitation, and cruelty, and for the generous impulse. She wishes in the usual way that the world were a decent place, that something could be done. When her writing is zippy, what comes through, along with her more than usual indignation, is her quirky quarter-turn away from the absolutely pat and predictable position. For example, she resists making women into long-suffering, noble, patience-on-a-monument types. At her best, Weldon is sharp and witty, gets the twitches, impulses, mannerisms exactly right. Her point of view allows you to be contentedly irate; she peoples the landscape with characters you can like, dislike, or even fear. As her following has recognized in the easy succession of "Weldons," she is another British pro.

Leader of the Band and *The Cloning of Joanna May* have a family resemblance to the earlier books. (There are fourteen previous novels and short-story collections.) They have the regular jumble of characters leading lives that we recognize as modern by their snarled netting of impulse, incoherence, and battering by uncontrollable forces. They are lightly spiced with Weldon's beloved metaphor, magic, without which her readers would feel they had not gotten the genuine article. Her wrath is everywhere in evidence, her ideas skitter and glitter in every direction.

But in these recent books, something has happened to her writing. It's as though Weldon, who like the rest of us must feel the despair-a-day that comes with the morning paper, has finally been overwhelmed. The crush of all that anger, all that desperation, appears to have squeezed out of these novels what Weldon, as a novelist, does best. Both books sound as though they were written from the top down. So many topics tackled—heavy topics, too: feminism (especially as it applies to women inching into middle age), heredity, power, ambition, love and marriage, sexual mores, free will, the hollowness of the middle class, the absurd social order, the wickedness of unbridled science, the sins and futility of war, and more. In *The Cloning of Joanna May* there is a lot of wheel-spinning over what constitutes the self, many paragraphs on the "eye" that sees and the "I" that is. Some topics come packed in little essay-ettes:

> Those who have rows are more alive than those who don't: make better friends, more interesting companions. They may wreak havoc but they understand their imperfections—witness how they project them upon others—they cry to heaven for justice. They believe in it.
>
> —*Cloning*

> Love, honor, obey and support, as long as we both shall live. Been to India, lately; seen the men *sitting*, while the women building workers heave and shovel: been to Africa, where the men smoke ganja and the women hoe the brick-hard soil: been out to dinner and counted the number of times your hostess *gets up*? No wonder the men feel bad about it.
>
> —*Starlady*

A lot of angry chatter. But meanwhile the characters have become dangerously thin and standoffish, the absurdity of the plots no longer entertainingly pointing to something more serious. In *The Cloning of Joanna May*, in which the writing takes on a peculiarly dispirited quality, all the people are, fittingly enough, as flat as cards. Starlady Sandra is a wan creation whom we do not especially like, whom we are not meant especially to like, who hardly likes herself:

> I had had affairs, even fallen in love, with various men: most wanted children: those who did I did not like. Sad. To prefer a Porsche and a peaceful annual holiday to the creation of children may seem sensible, but it is not likable.

When Weldon stops carrying us along in the rush of events, when her characters have no vitality, then we are forced to confront her less as a novelist who is engaged and more as a pure ideamonger. And then we are in trouble. Of course we recognize that she still stands on the side of the angels. But now the ideas have the ring of boilerplate bombast, the writing sounds choked-up and deadened, or pumped up into "cute" or simply soap-box shrill.

In *Leader of the Band*, Weldon is still able, here and there, to cut some of the minor characters loose from all this message-bearing and pneumatic prose-mongering, and they can be vivid. There is Mad Jack the trumpeter's unhappy teenaged daughter, confused and wretched over her father's taking a mistress, a situation she is barely old enough to understand. There is Matthew, Sandra's pretentious twit of a husband, for whom we genuinely suffer when Sandra deserts him at the party.

There is a fine moment when Sandra, like many another Weldon heroine, learns that she is pregnant (Weldon likes to resolve things with a new life when she can. In *The Cloning of Joanna May*, she does it by producing a new clone, one that Joanna can raise herself—the right way):

> I went to the doctor's surgery, just up the road from the Crédit Lyonnais, and sat only briefly in a small white room among posters of poisonous snakes and mushrooms. . . . Doctor Tarval was, or so I thought at first, a not very bright young man in his middle twenties, with an owl face, cropped hair, and perfect French manners. Language was a slight problem, but the vocabulary of pain can be mimed.

When Weldon can bring herself to resist the temptation to write tracts, she is once again the Weldon we remember. Otherwise, there is a sense that she is too obviously miming her own pain, not her characters', that the gestures have grown too frantic, or, finally, too exhausted.

JUDITH DUNFORD is a writer living in New York.

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The last new Nixon

ON AN ANCIENT TELEVISION SET, a kinescope of the Checkers speech unreels on an endless feedback loop. No matter how many times one has seen the performance, it remains utterly riveting: "I come before you tonight as a candidate for the vice presidency and as a man whose honesty and integrity have been questioned . . ." Is the youthful face on the screen, glistening with damp fear, the countenance that Dan Quayle imagines as his own in terrifying nightmares of exposure? No. Happy-go-lucky Dan could never attain these operatic high-Cs of self-pity. Only Richard Nixon has ever hit these notes, sustaining them for decades.

I ARRIVED AT THE RICHARD M. Nixon Library and Birthplace a few days before its dedication, as a worker was installing the silver-plated "N" above the entrance. "Welcome Presidents Nixon, Bush, Reagan, and Ford" read a banner strung across Yorba Linda Boulevard. Presidents come and go, but Nixon is forever. He was present at the beginning of the cold war, in the middle, and at its end. At every turn, there has been a new Nixon, a Nixon who shed his earlier malice and had grown into a statesman. And yet, for all the make-overs, for all the crises (many more than six), the fundamental Nixon has been preserved. From time immemorial, he has maintained the essence of his role: the compulsive self-justifying in which his grotesque distortions are advanced as sincerity. The Nixon Library unveils the newest, perhaps even the final, Nixon—the Nixon who belongs to the ages. Unfortunately, there is no gallery exhibiting the many new Nixons in the Nixon Library. Even so, this Nixon, like every one of his self-projections, remains unmistakably Nixonian.

NIXON'S VIEW OF HISTORY IS identical to his view of himself, a catalog of his resentments and enemies. A Nixon without enemies would not be Nixon at all. The library is the Checkers speech in brick and mortar. In it, history appears to serve his need for vindication.

THE NIXON LIBRARY SHOULD properly be an exhibit in a larger Nixon museum. Every object in the library needs a long commentary to explain its meaning. The visitor is often misdirected, an experience not unlike the Nixon presidency. For example, one display case, on Nixon's race for the Senate in 1950, shows the "Pink Sheet"—literally a pink sheet—on which he depicted the voting record of his opponent, Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas, in such categories as "Communist Line Foreign Policy Votes" and "Against Loyalty and Security." More than a half million of these leaflets were distributed. Alongside the "Pink Sheet," the library displays a negative flier put out by the Douglas campaign, as if to demonstrate that Nixon was simply responding in kind. There is no mention of the hundreds of thousands of anonymous nighttime calls—"Did you know that Helen Douglas is a Communist?"—followed by a click and dial tone. Roger Morris, in his superb and meticulous new biography, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician*, traces these calls to "the Nixon phone banks." This episode is uncelebrated in the exhibit on the 1950 campaign. In a way, Nixon slights his contribution to politics; for he was the father of the modern Republican negative campaign, without which George Bush's 1988 effort would have been unimaginable. (At the official opening ceremony, President Bush said that Nixon was dedicated to the proposition that "politics is poetry, not prose.") Yet Nixon wants to present his smears as purely defensive, an attempt at "balance."

THE LIBRARY'S ARTIFACTS, IN their sheer physicality, hint at larger meanings but in the end remain obscure. The actual Nixon birthplace, a lovingly restored whitewashed farmhouse, built by his father, is a mysterious place that may appear deceptively obvious. The house has a small kitchen, with a cast-iron stove, in which Hannah Nixon used to bake the pies she sold. The living room contains a piano and the dining table. Just beyond the table is the parents' bedroom, with a sentimental poem framed above the bed about a mother's pleasures in having boys. Upstairs, the four Nixon boys shared a small room, with a short ceiling, one window, and only two small beds. (Two of the brothers died at young ages.) The books in the house include Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *The Rover Boys Down East*. An eight-minute tape of Nixon reminiscing is filled with train whistles, old-timey music, and the bizarre suggestion he might have joined a rap group instead of having gone into politics, if there had been rap groups when he was growing up.

THE LIBRARY INTENDS TO CONvey the impression of a man who lived the American Dream, of his rise from humble surroundings to the presidency. The house is Exhibit A in an all-American saga. But millions lived in such houses then; only one produced Richard Nixon. The Nixons were hardly wealthy, but Frank Nixon, as Roger Morris, Stephen Ambrose, and other Nixon scholars have documented, eventually made a respectable, comfortable living. Richard Nixon, moreover, did not rise on the steam of his own ambition and talent alone, but with the considerable assistance at every turn of larger and larger interests. But the library does not tell us this story. Nixon prefers the myth that the little house seems to represent.

THE LIBRARY ITSELF IS BUILT along the architectural lines of a Quaker meeting house. It has a deliberate feel of simplicity and honesty. Before its opening, the acting director announced that scholars and researchers critical of Nixon would not be permitted to use the facilities, especially Bob Woodward. Following a minor uproar, this policy was reversed. Then Nixon banned the print press from the inside of the library while he was there. A week later *The Los Angeles Times* reported that the famous "smoking gun" tape in the Watergate exhibit had been edited to appear less damaging to Nixon, as though a further cover-up might yet allow him to escape. History is fungible.

THE WALLS OF THE HALLWAY leading to the room where archival material may be perused are decorated with gold lettering to put scholars in the correct frame of mind. In gilt, Nixon's accomplishments are spelled out. FOUR HIGH COURT APPOINTMENTS. (The Carswell and Haynsworth rejections are unnoted.) 18 YEAR OLD VOTE. Above the door: ENDED THE VIETNAM WAR. A visitor, remembering the scenes of the Saigon embassy roof a year after Nixon's resignation and seven years after his inauguration, thinks of Washington's monument to the Nixon legacy: the black-slated Vietnam Memorial.

THE GIFT SHOP SELLS ONLY books written by Nixon and David Eisenhower. One cannot purchase any of the biographies here. (The contrast in this respect with the gift shop at the FDR Library in Hyde Park is strong.) One can, however, buy Nixon mugs, Nixon pens, Nixon shirts, Nixon hats, a U.S. and Nixon Library flag set, Nixon folding chairs, and ties with the "RN" initials. *Six Crises* wasn't in stock yet, so I bought the tie. I was the first cash customer at the Nixon Library.

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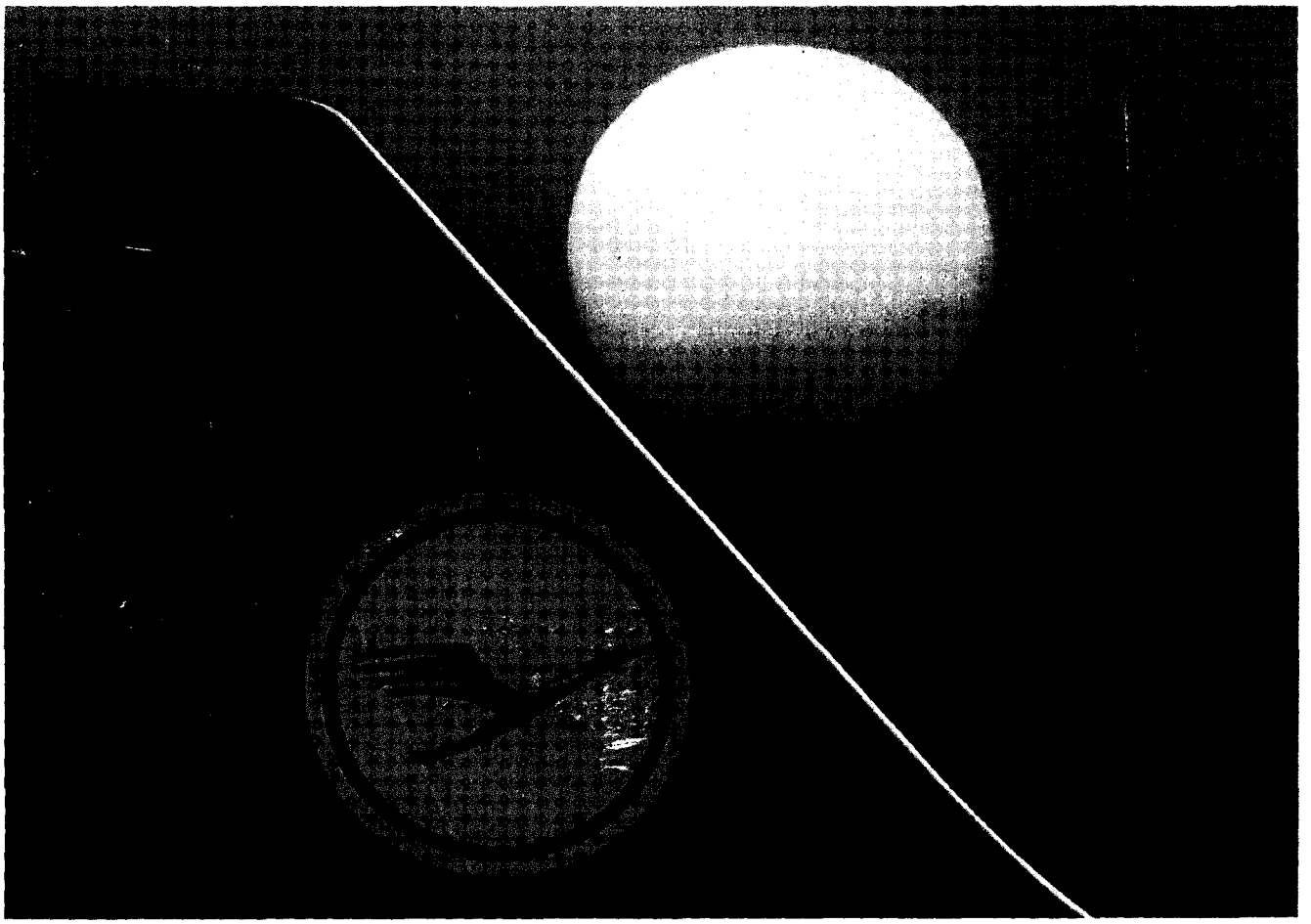

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